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The Cut Flower QUARTERLY

Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers Inc.

for growers of field and greenhouse specialty cuts

Inside this Issue

3 From the President

6 The Farmer and the Florist

8 Grower Profile

10 IPM Update

14 The Cockroach and the Coyote of the Cut Flower Trade—Would You Grow Them?

18 Growing Gentians

24 Regional Reports

36 Grower Grant Reports

48 ASCFG News

50 From the Director

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From the PRESIDENT

Collaborations and Connections

Jennie Love

Since my last letter to you fine people, the main task I've been tackling at my farm has been clearing land for a new large-scale planting of perennials and woodies. It's good work in the colder months. The woodland floor where we'll be planting is dormant so I can see the bones of the space. And the cold means it's not stifling to suit up in a layered armor of heavy Carhartts to defend against all the nasty thorns in the brambles. Though after a couple hours of back-breaking effort to pull massive vines out of the trees, a lot of those defensive layers come off!

This new land of mine is covered in a network of invasive vines, namely multiflora rose, honeysuckle, wild grape, porcelain berry, and poison ivy. The work to clear them is tedious, and yet surprisingly gratifying. There's a sense of meditation that sets in as one spends hour after hour with loppers in outstretched hands, making cut after cut.

I learned an unexpected lesson along the way. These four species of vines are successful in their ambitious efforts to stifle out all the surrounding competing plants—even the massive old trees—only by working together. The multiflora rose seems to get started first, its thorns making it less likely to get easily grubbed out by wildlife and less-determined humans. Then as the multiflora gets established, the honeysuckle starts threading through it, weaving a network of thinner, more flexible stems that make it nearly impossible to separate the two species.

Without the multiflora rose, the honeysuckle would be easily annihilated by browsing and mowing. But the shield of the rose thorns gives it protection. The honeysuckle in return gives the multiflora more structure; and as the two grow together and mature, they become a force with which to be reckoned. The honeysuckle sends out runners in every direction that divert the attention of someone like me looking for the main root of the multiflora rose that's at the heart of it all (the "Mother" as I've come to call those foundational multifloras, that often have massive trunks that require a chainsaw to cut).

After these two invasive besties get going, in come the wild grape and porcelain berry to scramble up the infrastructure the two original vines have made. Climbing the multiflora/honeysuckle ladder, the grape and porcelain berry can now reach up into the lower branches of the established trees in the forest, away from grazing deer. They then shoot to the top of the canopy and start sucking up all the sunshine, weakening the trees, which ultimately helps the multiflora/honeysuckle duo on the ground who can now dominate the forest floor even more. Last, but certainly not least, is the poison

As individuals, each on our own little piece of ground, we can be pretty vulnerable. But together, through our connections, we are all reaching for the sun and succeeding on a larger level. The stronger those connections, the stronger we each become.

ivy. It chooses to scramble up the trunks of the trees themselves, deterring anyone who might want to climb up there and clip those grape and porcelain vines out.

And here you thought plants were just plants. It turns out they are clever collaborators who are making smart decisions to succeed as a community, despite so many critters and humans wanting to cut them back.

As I spent day after day among this vine community, I stopped being so angry at them (man, those multiflora rose thorns are a beeeeep!). Instead I came to find myself in deep admiration of their collaboration. It would have been so much easier to destroy just one species if it was growing alone. But because they worked together and made physical connections to support each other, rather than compete for the same little patch of ground, they are able to take over acres of land in just a year or two.

I never would have guessed invasive vines would have some deeply instructive impact on me (far more likely they would destroy my lower back). But this unexpected lesson has been really sitting in my heart as of late, making me think about how connections between humans can be—and should be—so powerful and effective. The ASCFG is nearly 2000 growers strong now, each with immensely different goals, backgrounds, and needs. As individuals, each on our own little piece of ground, we can be pretty vulnerable. But together, through our connections, we are all reaching for the sun and succeeding on a larger level. The stronger those connections, the stronger we each become.

This was very evident at the Denver meeting in February. Our events at the ASCFG are usually pretty lively and always educational, but this particular one was humming with a new level of support and connection. Maybe it's because many of the expert speakers were being very vulnerable with sharing the hard (often emotionally painful) lessons they have learned running effective and sustainable businesses over the years. Or maybe it was because so many of the attendees were attending their first event and had brought wide-open hearts with them. Or maybe it is just where we are at as an organization. Whatever the reason, there was such an inspiring mixing of new energy and seasoned experience in those rooms.

The ASCFG has nearly tripled its number of members in just five short years. That kind of rapid growth can be hard for an organization to manage. Our group's needs are getting more and more diverse. How do we serve and support everyone? That's the challenge your ASCFG Board is currently facing.

I hope that we'll all take that invasive vine lesson to heart and continue to thread ourselves together, spreading what we grow (sustainable local flowers) across more and more of the greater global floral industry. Our collaborations and visceral connections are the way forward for this incredible, grassroots association that has bootstrapped its way into an increasingly important role. A phrase was mentioned at our Board's last planning meeting that really rings true: "by growers, for growers". That's what the ASCFG is all about and each one of us has got a vital role to play in the success of our ultimate mission.

"What can you do to help the greater whole?"

I'm going to continue to contemplate that question myself as spring settles in and planting commences. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to go cut some more vines! Just because I admire them doesn't mean they get to stay!

Jennie Love is owner of Love 'n Fresh Flowers.
Contact her at jennie@lovenfreshflowers.com

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The Farmer and the Florist

We Asked, You Answered

Ellen Frost and Laura Beth Resnick

We asked for your questions about relationships between farmers and florists, and you gave some good ones!

What is the best way to start a relationship with the florists in your area in the off-season? Sunnyside Florals, Maryland

Ellen: I would definitely recommend making first contact with a florist in the off-season, and by email rather than with a phone call. This first email is a chance to introduce yourself and your farm, and explain what you have to offer in terms of flowers. Let them know that you'd like to send them an availability list once you have flowers ready for sale. You can also tell them that you'd like to meet them in person and drop off some samples when the season starts. For us, there is no real benefit to meeting with a new grower until the season begins and we can see samples of the flowers.

When the season starts and you have flowers, reach back out to the florist and request a time to come by to meet and show them some samples. At this meeting, you should be prepared with the following:

- A list of what you're growing for the season.
- A short description of your policies on ordering, delivery, communication, and payment.
- Your business card and contact information.

Once the meeting is complete, follow up with an email and your availability list, or a specific next step.

I have several meetings lined up with florists who contacted me through Instagram. What are some of the "must-ask" questions I should ask them? Everbloom Fields, Texas

Ellen: When starting new relationships with florists, several things will be important to understand as you move forward. These questions will help you best serve each client.

- How often do they buy local flowers?
- What methods do they use to sell flowers (weddings, events, funerals retail sales, other ways)?
- What are they NOT getting from their other suppliers?
- Are they looking for specific items?

Laura Beth: Also, don't forget to have a few "must tells" lined up. It's your job to educate florists who aren't familiar with local flowers about how it works. Set realistic expectations right away. For example, be sure to tell them:

- You won't have dahlias in March or peonies in September, but when you do have dahlias and peonies, they will be outstanding.
- Weather deeply affects your yields and crop timings, but you will do your utmost to communicate well if weather is threatening your oncoming crops.
- Certain crops cannot be held in a cooler: basil, lemon verbena, zinnias, and apple mint don't do well under 42 degrees.

This will be our first commercial growing season as we try to bring flowers to market. What do you know now that you would recommend to those starting a new farm? Franklin Flower Farm, North Carolina

Laura Beth: Oh, man! Some things that I wish I had known when I started working with florists:

- Wait until your quality is awesome to work with florists. Start out with easier channels like farmers' markets, CSAs, farm stands, or grocery stores. I can't tell you how many times Ellen had to tell me that my stems were too short, that foliage was wilty, that I was cutting something at the wrong stage; most florists would be over me by now, don't count on having an Ellen in your corner!

- Don't be cheap. Once you have a strong product, set a minimum where you think it should be. Respect your work enough to charge the right amount for it.
- Once I lost my temper at a florist in a heated moment and she started crying! Confusing situations will come up often. You might feel completely befuddled and have no clue what to do. If that's the case, stop and think about the person you want to be before you take action. Let your personal values guide you, not your emotional reactions.

This is my first year selling to florists. My small farm cannot meet their entire weekly needs. How do I manage their expectations but at the same time encourage weekly purchases to produce steady sales? East End Farms, Riverhead, New York

Laura Beth: If I had to pick one most important thing to remember as you start working with florists, it's that quality is king. Florists can easily ignore emails and phone calls, but no way can they ignore gorgeous, tall delphinium, or fresh lisianthus straight from the farm. Start working with florists only when you feel confident that the quality of your stems will wow them. That's the best way to encourage steady sales!

Florists can easily ignore emails and phone calls, but no way can they ignore gorgeous, tall delphinium, or fresh lisianthus straight from the farm.

Once you have quality blooms, then thoughtful communication is the best way to grow your relationships with florists. The idea is to show your commitment and excellence not through just your amazing flowers, but also through the care you put into your emails to and meetings with your florists. Explain to them that you're small, but have plans to be a great asset to their business, so stick with you! Make sure they understand that starting a farm is a learning curve, and you'll give immediate refunds if anything you bring them isn't up to their standards. Ask them to give you constructive criticism—ask them regularly, because they're busy and will probably forget. Try to think of creative ways to show them you appreciate their business. If you're growing figs, bring them some free fruit! Treat them to a coffee when it's convenient for them. Give them samples of your oncoming crops.

The reality is that not every florist will be patient with you and cultivate that relationship. I have a florist now who is frustrated that she isn't getting our winter greenhouse flowers, but she barely bought from me when we started out. She doesn't understand that I'm prioritizing those who believed in me when my business was young. That's okay; some relationships will be stronger than others, none of us can jive perfectly with each and every florist. Nor should we! Communicate who you are and what you do, and if a florist doesn't seem to "get" it, then find others who do.

When dealing with shorter-stemmed flowers like anemones or smaller flower bunches (like scabiosa) do you sleeve them in clear sleeves before you deliver to your florist? It seems like even the smallest sleeve size would dwarf them. Everbloom Fields, Lancaster, Texas

Laura Beth: We don't use sleeves or any packaging when we sell to florists. To me, one of the many great benefits of buying local is NOT having to deal with all of the packaging that normally comes with wholesale flowers. We bunch all of our flowers in 10-stem bunches with a rubber band, put them in a bucket, and that's it! For short stems like grape hyacinth, I'll pack a little mason jar in a box for safe transit.

Ellen: As a florist concerned with our business' environmental impact, we would prefer our flowers not be sleeved. Removing sleeves and disposing of them is an extra step that we don't want to spend time on, and it creates more unnecessary waste. We have worked with growers to stop sleeving flowers they deliver to us, and have been willing to stop buying from growers who will not make this change.

Ellen Frost is owner of Local Color Flowers. Contact her at ellen@locoflo.com
Laura Beth Resnick is owner of Butterbee Farm. Contact her at butterbeefarm@gmail.com

Taking the Leap

Jodi Helmer

Taking the Leap: A North Carolina grower likens her business to a field of wildflowers

Emily Copus believes that the adage about wildflowers "First they sleep, then they creep, then they leap." applies to her business.

"Like wildflowers that, in their dormant phases, are growing this whole network of roots hidden under the soil and then, all of a sudden, the flowers start growing like crazy because they have this huge network of roots that get activated…that's what I have focused on doing," Copus says. "We're in the creep phase at the moment [because] we've built all of these different networks and different sales lines and we are working on activating those in different ways; the leap phase is going to happen soon."

The journalist-turned-farmer started growing cut flowers in 2016 and, though two of her great-grandfathers were flower farmers, Copus had little experience on the farm before she started Carolina Flowers.

"Even though I didn't have any experience on the farm, I heard a lot of stories about how things were done and had a pretty good understanding of what the industry went through [as domestic flower farms lost market share to farms in South America] and how that transformation affected family farms," Copus says. "It gave me a lot to think about in terms of how I want to operate my business in a way that can roll with the global economy."

Emily Copus

Growing on the Right Scale

Carolina Flowers is a three-acre farm in Marshall, North Carolina. The mountain town is one of the most biodiverse regions in the world, and offers a temperate climate well suited to growing cut flowers.

Copus focuses on "super perishable" flowers like dahlias, anemones, and ranunculus that are difficult to ship, providing local growers an advantage; she also focuses on tender annual fillers such as basil and mint that lack the profit margins international growers need to make them worthwhile crops.

"These are crops that can be imported, but I feel there is a significant quality difference between local and imported flowers," she says. "A real directive for us is figuring out how we can scale that need to answer the question of how we're going to create a sustainable business."

Dahlias have been a staple crop for Carolina Flowers. Copus grows multiple varieties, including 'Cafe au Lait', 'Rip City', 'Lady Nathalie', 'Creve Coeur', 'Spartacus', 'Sweet Nathalie', 'Small World', and 'Renate Tozio', and earlier this year, she received a grant to expand production.

An Alternative to Tobacco

The $6,000 Western North Carolina AgOptions Grant, funded through the North Carolina Tobacco Trust Fund Commission, could lead Carolina Flowers to become the largest dahlia grower in the region.

"With this expansion…we have the potential to really scale our production and reach florists throughout the Southeast," she explains.

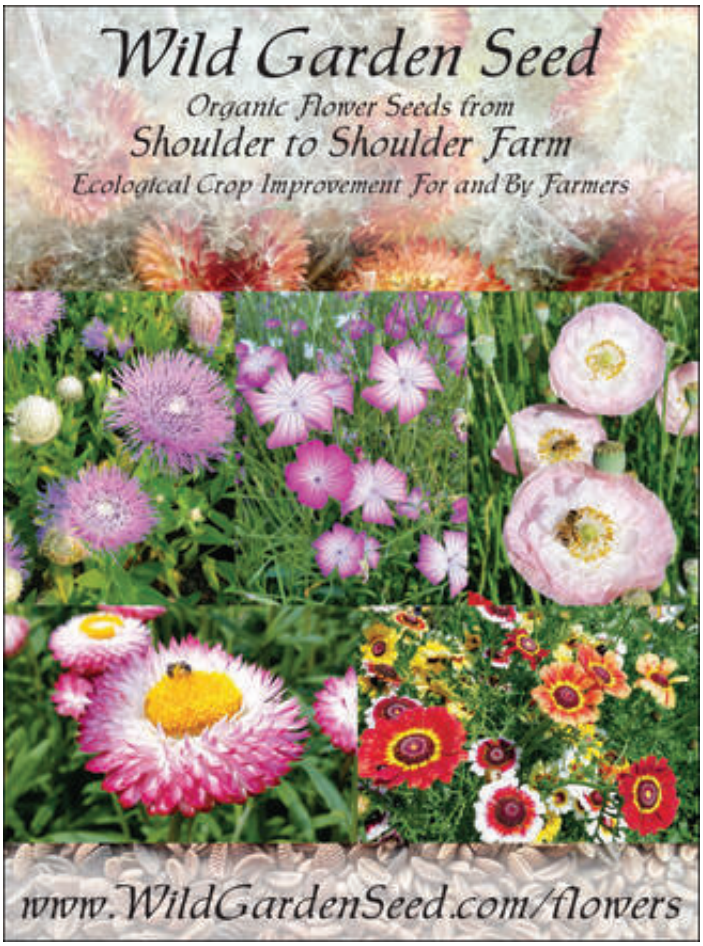
Expanding production, while exciting, is also challenging. In the mountains of North Carolina, wide open fields and flat, tillable acreage are almost impossible to find. Carolina Flowers is spread across four different properties (and counting) and Copus is always on the lookout for additional land suitable for growing flowers.

"When (western North Carolina) was tobacco country, farmers were growing tobacco in whatever flat spot was available, so there were small fields on the side of the road, near cell towers, behind their houses, and in other crazy places where you would never think to plant anything," she explains. "There isn't much tobacco being grown anymore but a lot of people still want their land to be farmed and I'm always looking for opportunities to create relationships and expand the farm."

Forging relationships with other growers has also helped Copus generate additional opportunities for Carolina Flowers. In addition to selling her blooms at the Asheville City Market, offering a CSA subscription, hosting flower arranging workshops, leading farm tours and providing design services and cut flowers ranging from tulips, gladiolus, and delphinium to poppies, lilies, and sunflowers for weddings and events, Copus created a loose collective of dahlia growers who come together to fill bulk orders.

"By getting all of the small growers together, we can fill large orders on a weekly basis during dahlia season…and making a wholesale outlet available to smaller growers…that can help stabilize the market," she explains. "It's been really inspiring for me to find ways for the women who are growing flowers in my community to work together to make more money and create more opportunities. I hope, going forward, that I can find more ways to collaborate because I think that's the future of our industry."

Jodi Helmer is a freelance writer in North Carolina.
Contact her at jodi@jodihelmer.com



Using IPM Methods for Dealing with Major Insect Pests of Dahlias

Stanton Gill, Nancy Rechcigl, Suzanne Klick, and Rachel Ross

In the spring of 2018, Nick Weber of the Maryland Dahlia Society asked us to develop an integrated pest management approach for dealing with insect and mite pests of dahlia plantings. Over the years we have developed many biological control programs for greenhouses crops with good success rates. We decided that a combination of systemic chemical and biological control releases could work well. Working closely with Nancy Rechcigl of Syngenta, Bell Nursery of Burtonsville, Jan Meneley of AgBio of Westminster, Colorado, and Koppert Company, we analyzed several products before settling on the use of Mainspring drenches applied twice during the year, combined with predacious mite releases, use of banker plants and predacious insects, and pheromone and food-baited sticky traps.

The first step was obtaining seed of an ornamental pepper called 'Purple Flash' from Ball International. We used this cultivar for its characteristic of continual blooming during the growing season. These peppers would be used as banker plants to produce pollen and nectar to feed a predacious bug called *Orius*, the minute pirate bug, which is used to control thrips. Bell Nursery started growing the plants for us in March. Pepper plants are slow to get going and we needed them in bloom by midsummer, so three months needed to be allotted to have them in bloom for our Maryland growing season.

The dahlia tubers were planted in late May at two sites in Maryland: Nick Weber's Heritage Rosarium in Brookeville, and Crazy 4 Dahlias, John Spandenberg's Damascus farm. We had treated blocks and conventional treated blocks of plants. On the treated blocks we made a soil drench of Mainspring at a rate of 8 oz. /100 gallons of water. Each plant was drenched at the base with 8 oz. (237 mL or .24 L) of prepared liquid solution.

Mainspring™ GNL is a suspension concentrate (SC) formulation containing 1.67 pounds of cyantraniliprole per gallon. Cyantraniliprole belongs to the anthranilic diamide chemical class, introducing a new class of chemistry in IRAC Group 28 to ornamental insect control. Mainspring quickly stops insect feeding after ingestion. It is compatible with many beneficial insects and mites.

This Mainspring application provided protection from aphids and thrips feeding on dahlia foliage and stems. The two common species of aphids found on dahlias are green peach aphid and melon aphid. Plants were monitored on a weekly basis, and no aphids were detected in the first 12 weeks of growth. Also, no thrips populations were found on treated plants.

We obtained *Amblyseius cucumeris* mites, a predatory mite that feeds on thrips nymphs, and has been used for prevention, control, and maintenance of various thrips species with fairly good success in greenhouses. The mites use sucking mouthparts to pierce and ingest contents of their prey. We purchased the mites under the name THRIPEX-PLUS from Koppert Biological Systems. For the first release we used mites in a loose grain container mix, sprinkled on dahlia foliage and flowers. The growers found the grain mix undesirable in appearance so we switched to using *A. cucumeris* in small sachets. Each paper sachet with a hook contained 1,000 predatory mites and grain mites (all stages), mixed with bran.

Amblyseius cucumeris performs best in temperature under 90F. Maryland temperatures can exceed this in July and August, so in July we switched to sachets of the predacious mite *Amblyseius swirskii*, which performs better at higher temperatures. This mite is about 2 to 3 times the cost of *A. cucumeris*.

Materials used: two 100 mL bottles containing 1000 minute pirate bugs.

Pirate bugs were sprinkled at each pepper plant at both sites on August 30, 2018.

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Application Breakdown:

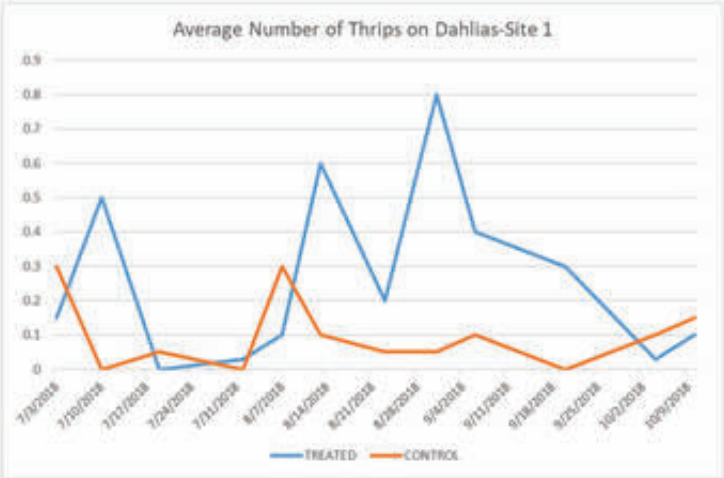
	Systemic- Mainspring®	Thripex	Swirskii	Minute Pirate Bug
Applied June 12	8 oz. of prepared solution applied as drench at base			
Released June 28		1 sachet/plant (hung). The first application was a sprinkled grain mix.		
Released July 12		1 sachet/plant (hung)		
Released July 26			1 sachet/plant (hung)	
Released August 13			2 sachets/plant (1 hung, 1 sprinkled)	
Released August 30			2 sachets/plant (1 hung, 1 sprinkled)	Sprinkled at each pepper plant.
Released September 13		2 sachets/plant (1 hung, 1 sprinkled)		
Released October 4		2 sachets/plant (1 hung, 1 sprinkled)		

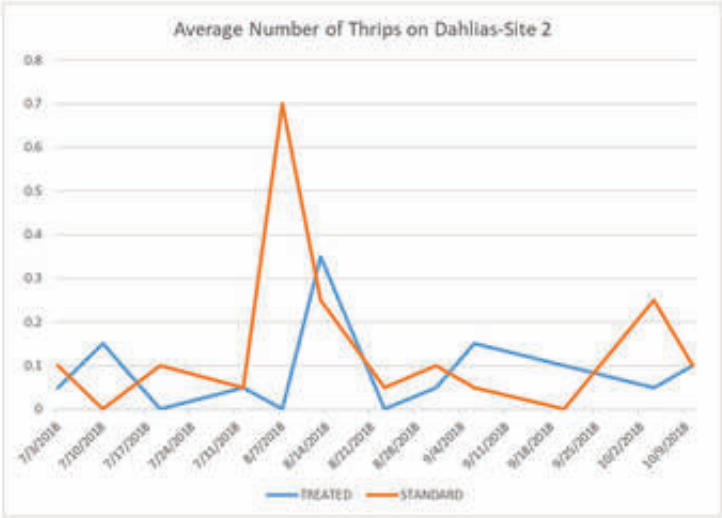
Trial Cost Breakdown:

	Thripex (per 500 sachets)	Swirskii (per 500 sachets)	Minute Pirate Bug (per 2 100 ml bottle)	Shipping & Handling	Pro-rated price per 254 treated plants*
June 28	$166.75			$51.73	$110.99 (at $0.4369/unit)
July 12	$166.75			$53.41	$111.84 (at $0.4403/unit)
July 26		$349.75		$39.72	$197.85 (at $0.7789/unit)
Aug 13		$349.75		$39.72	$197.85 (at $0.7789/unit)
Aug 30		$349.75	$273.00	$39.72	$470.85 (at $1.8537/unit)
Sep 13	$166.75			$52.87	$111.27 (at $0.4392/unit)
Oct 4	$166.75			$53.89	$112.09 (at $0.4412/unit)

Total material cost: $2,320.31 Pro-rated cost: $1,313.04

*Prices indicated throughout reflect the cost of purchasing the obligatory package amount. The pro-rated price reflects the cost of the materials that were actually applied throughout the trial.





Summary

Mainspring (cyantraniliprole) at 8 oz./100 gallons of water, applied as a soil drench, was excellent in controlling aphids on treated plants, and provided control for the entire growing season. The Mainspring drench applications did not impact predator releases of the predacious mites or Orius released during our study.

The season of 2018 had records amount of rain in both frequency and abundance. This generally suppressed both Tetranychid mite (two-spotted spider mites) and thrips activity. The dahlias in the biological control/systemic chemical control area had a greater number of blooms and thus had a slightly higher populations of thrips in blooms. The thrips populations remained low on the conventionally-treated plants and the plants that were treated with chemical and biological control.

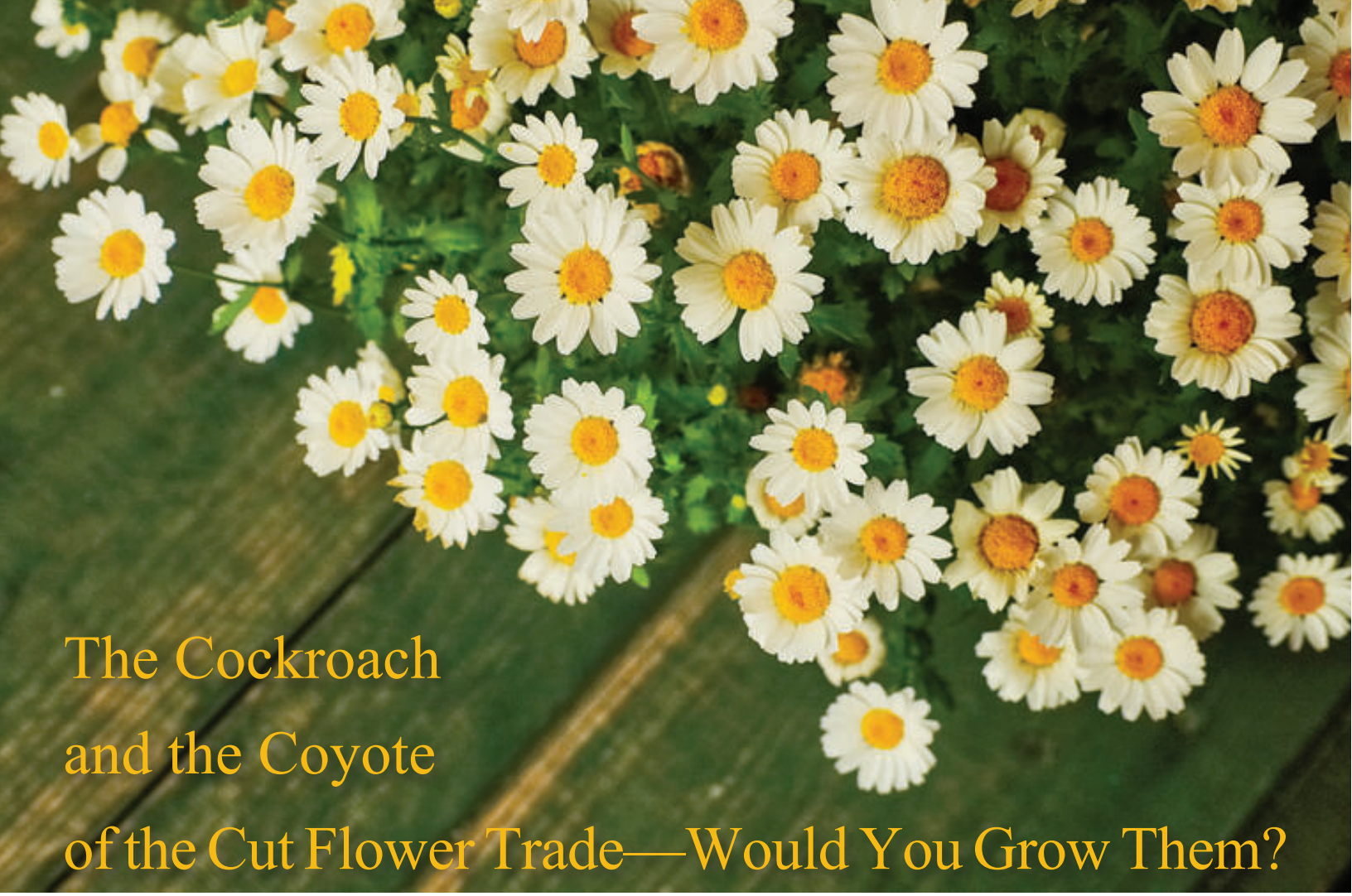
The banker plants did well, and after the initial release the *Orius* populations remained active throughout the season. We switched from releasing *Amblysieus cucumeris* in midsummer to A. *swirskii*, which costs about three times more.

We encountered a pest during the study that we had not anticipated—spotted cucumber beetle. Working with Jan Meneley of AgBio, Inc of Westminster, Colorado, we evaluated a yellow sticky card baited with pheromone and essence of cucumber extract. The traps worked well in catching insects, and preventing feeding damage to the petal rays of the dahlias.

The quality of the plants and flowers were equally high on the conventional and biological/systemic chemical treated plants.

We would like to conduct a second year of this project, ideally with a less rainy season. We will try reducing the number of biological releases to reduce the cost per plant.

Stanton Gill is Extension Specialist in Nursery and Greenhouse IPM, Central Maryland Research and Education Center, University of Maryland Extension and Professor with the Landscape technology Program, Montgomery College.
Contact him at sgill@umd.edu



The Cockroach and the Coyote of the Cut Flower Trade—Would You Grow Them?

Ralph Thurston

Consider adding these perennials to your lineup.

Many specialty cut flowers don't make it onto large-scale wholesalers' lists because of their short bloom period. A fairly typical perennial may bloom for just three weeks, leaving a very narrow sales window for clients who can't memorize the hundreds of species available throughout the year. A new flower, no matter how long lived or usable, that hasn't shown up on the list for a year doesn't ring the client memory bell, so the first week on any wholesale truck is usually a matter of re-acquaintance. The second week of availability brings familiarity during which a buyer gets a feel for the product, and only on the third week, just as the harvest is nearly finished, do clients really get excited—and then it's gone for a year. Hence, wholesalers shy away from many specialty cuts.

But there are ways for growers to lengthen the market window of many species. Scheduling, early and/or late pruning, shade application, and cultivar selection, in addition to the usual techniques of greenhouse planting and cooler usage, allow growers to extend a natural sales period of just a few weeks to as long as the entire summer.

A little clever scheduling lengthens the sales season from three weeks to all summer for some perennials. We plant new crops of solid sellers like delphinium every spring, putting two hundred-size plugs in the ground a week or two before our last frost date (May 10). These same-year plants typically flower in July, shortly after prior years' plots finish, lengthening a three-week harvest to six weeks. To lengthen the window further, we immediately prune—severely—after harvesting last year's delphinium, which then blooms in August as the same-year crop finishes. The second crop stems are of shorter stature, of course.

Heliopsis responds to these techniques similarly, and both flowers can be manipulated further by pruning before bud to delay flowering. Pruning after harvest, of course, results in a second late crop, but because so many other yellow

flowers come in season late—black-eyed Susans, sunflowers—we normally just write heliopsis off for the rest of the year. If you organize your pruning and sequence planting perfectly you can harvest these crops throughout the summer. Hopefully, your market can withstand the onslaught. If not, you may end up plowing under excess plantings.

Asclepias tuberosa performs well using the last year/this year scheduling, and reacts favorably to pruning at any time, allowing the grower to delay flowering or string it out throughout the summer. Its brethren, *incarnata*, is less flexible, so while we plant a new crop almost every year to add to the prior year's, we rarely get much flowering from the same-year plants—those in longer season growing areas may get different results. We find it doesn't really respond to pruning as well, either.

Perennial scabiosa, a prolific bloomer that produces continually if harvested hard and deadheaded to prohibit seeding, still has its limits, and starts looking pretty shabby after many weeks of cutting. Harvesters may not cut deep enough, resulting in short, unusable stems later in the year, and markets may not match production, creating a rise in deadheading time that becomes unprofitable. If you plant a new crop of plugs prior to the last frost, the old bed can be mowed down about the time they begin blooming, making for a seamless sales period. The new crop stems will tower above what the old plants have been offering, throwing bigger blooms and sturdier stems that far surpass typical wholesale offerings.

Fooling Mother Nature

We treat *Matricaria* and black-eyed Susans, technically multi-year species, as biennials, sometimes as annuals, and sometimes as tri-annuals, since they can occasionally make it into a third year. Because they don't require winter dormancy, these crops bloom the same year as planted, but to get an earlier bloom we nurse last year's crop through the winter (this doesn't always work for Susans if the winter is too harsh) for a harvest that begins 3-4 weeks before same year crops.

These two crops are the cockroaches and coyotes of the cut flower trade, withstanding grower and nature misuse with ease, absorbing a severe hacking at almost any stage and coming back with a vigorous rebloom. You can, however, be a little too ambitious with pruning—don't eliminate the black-eyed Susan rosettes or you might kill the plant; instead lift your weed whacker or mower just above those lower leaves so something remains on the plant to retrieve the sun's energy for further growth.

Matricaria acts as a year-round filler for our clients, so with proper timing we offer it on a continual basis. Greenhouse plug plantings beat outside beds to bloom by only a few days, so we rarely use inside crops, saving that valuable space for other crops. It must be said, though, that an inside *Matricaria* crop exceeds in quality any outdoor planting, with taller, fuller blooms and thicker stems, but fewer of them, since without cold weather the plant doesn't "stool out" with multiple stems as outside crops, which face constant supplies of cold nights, do.

In any given year, we might plant *Matricaria* plugs in a greenhouse, then in a hoophouse, then early outside (It tolerates very low temperatures—our plugs have taken 20-degree nights with minimal damage.) with later plug plantings in May and June. Between shearing back part of last year's crop, sequence planting, and mowing after harvest for a second bloom, we have continual supplies of *Matricaria*—if our planning is right and the weather cooperates.

Refrain from pruning slow-growing perennials—every leaf counts when it comes to energy and nutrient collection, so removing foliage amounts to depriving an unemployed plant of its bank account.

When sequence planting either fast-growing perennials or annuals, any grower needs to note that the "days" to bloom listed on seed packets or spec sheets don't really refer to real time but to an average summer day—though what area of the world that average is taken from I'm not sure. Unless you live near the equator, where days and nights tend to be of similar length all year and temperatures stay stable, that average summer day might equal three April days when comparing light and heat units. Thus, three weeks between plantings in April and May equals about one week in the summer for us, and the same might be said for fall plantings, though we have such severe winters that we have little to no experience with late seedings or plantings (our first frost often falls between September 10-20, so adjust your efforts accordingly).

Some perennials, while not known for repeat performance, still respond to manipulation by pruning—you just have to cut back before any bolting occurs. A nasty May hailstorm taught us this when it knocked the perennials down, destroying a delphinium crop just a few days from bloom and shredding any foliage already emerged on other perennials. We mowed portions of a number of crops back to the ground, hoping to salvage the year's blooms, and discovered that globe thistle, mowed before bolting occurs, starts flowering right as the unmowed crop finishes—a great discovery, since designers love this crop and we could sell it all year long if we just knew how to extend the bloom time. Heuchera, in bud at the time it hailed, got mowed down and came back with a vengeance, meaning we will be able to have a normally timed crop next year and, in addition, a secondary crop to follow it.

Bush clematis, vigorous as they are, respond to pruning both before bloom and after without suffering long-term damage. *recta* and *integrifolia* can be manipulated at the grower's will to lengthen out the market season, and since both re-bloom—and bloom again in longer growing season areas—can be available throughout the summer. Taller, vining clematis that tolerate or need spring pruning can be cut back in stages early in the year, to stagger bloom time somewhat—though the effect has its limits. 'Paul Farges', an extremely vigorous early bloomer with small white blossoms, yields blooms for a long period if you cut some plants back early, others a week or two later, and others after that. Once established, this clematis can almost be said to be immortal, so hard pruning seems to matter not at all.

Rules of Thumb

In general, later stems of species pruned before normal flowering tend to be considerably shorter than those left uncut, so in high light areas avoid using the technique on short species. And refrain from pruning slow-growing perennials—every leaf counts when it comes to energy and nutrient collection, so removing foliage amounts to depriving an unemployed plant of its bank account.

Try using shade to extend a given species' bloom. While daylength sensitivity and heat unit requirements may limit the elasticity of a particular species' flowering period, most species have at least some wiggle room in which to bloom and shade can help you take advantage of it. For us, a field-grown crop of phlox finishes blooming just as a counterpart crop under shade begins, and the crop under shade is taller and lusher, being protected from our harsh, dry climate.

Phlox is particularly amenable to all sorts of manipulations: you can sequentially plant the roots to get blooms throughout the year, but you'll have to work out the timing for your climate and latitude.

Other species not hindered by a tight daylength window likely can be treated similarly with shade: monkshood, lobelia, lavender, and lysimachia among them. Also, cultivars of a species labeled "garden" often bloom shorter than their parents do, too short for the cut flower trade, but under shade they may reach a stature that makes them usable—give that species you thought you couldn't use a try in your shadehouse.

Different cultivars of a given species often bloom at generally similar times—some species in spring, some in summer, others in the fall—but particular varieties may bloom a few days earlier or later than their counterparts. Early veronicas (often shorter ones) can bloom three weeks before later, taller varieties that require more time to develop. While the stem length and bloom size vary and the hues differ slightly, the shape and general color designers want remain. It's not a perfect solution, but not every floral situation is an emergency demanding exactness.

You can also use greenhouses and hoophouses to alter bloom time for many species, including phlox, bringing them to bloom earlier or later, as needed. This works better, of course, for crops that don't require vernalization (a winter cold period) to bloom, though if you're willing to use your greenhouse space you can fall plant those species, too, to extend the market window.

A cooler, of course, also extends the market window, normally by at least a week. Once you've kept a product in water for a week, though, you best start considering most flowers as an event-only sale, since vase length diminishes after being held for long periods.

Do a test run before you go all out with any season-extending technique, as some one-and-done species will indeed be done if you prune them—the most obvious ones being bulb crops like lilies, tulips, eremerus, and daffodils—and some species can't be pushed either forward or backward in the season since they have very specific daylength needs. If you grow a crop that your clients constantly clamor for, give it a longer availability period to heighten your operation's profitability.

Ralph Thurston, along with Jeriann Sabin, is owner of Bindweed Farm in Blackfoot, Idaho, as well as co-author of Deadhead: The Bindweed Way to Grow Flowers *and* All Pollen, No Petal: Behind the Flower Farming Dream.
Contact him at bindweedfarm@aol.com

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Growing Gentians

Paul Sansone

The long, elegant stems of a well-grown gentian are a sight to behold. The most prized are those with rich sapphire blue flowers, but cultivars with ruby red, royal purple or rosy pink flowers can command attention as well. The most commonly grown cultivars are those derived from *Gentiana makinoi* and *G. triflora.*

So, why isn't everyone growing gentians? They generally don't like summer heat, limiting prime production territory to the fields of coastal British Columbia, Washington State, Oregon, and California, or to hoophouses in Canada and northern United States. But cut flowers growers are an enterprising lot, and should consider trying them. You might find a jewel of a cut flower.

Propagation from Seed

Seed germination is greatly increased by cold treatment. Store seed at 0F for at least two weeks; seed can be held for long periods at this temperature without decreasing germination rates. A longer storage time at 0F appears to enhance germination.

Plants should be produced in outdoor seed beds rather than flats or plug trays. Germination rates in trays can be the same as outdoor production, but seedling loss can be up to 100% for unidentified reasons.

The seed bed should be prepared at least a month before direct seeding. Well-drained loam or sandy soil is best, with a pH of 4.5 to 6.

Seeds are extremely fine and weeding after germination will damage seedlings, so seed beds that will produce minimal weed competition should be used. Amend soil with finished compost and a complete plant fertilizer, deeply cultivate, and shape bed. Clean beds of future weed pressure by preparing beds and watering, allowing existing weed seeds to germinate. After two weeks pull larger weeds and flame-weed the bed to eliminate smaller weeds. Avoid tilling or cultivating which will expose more latent seeds in the soil to germination conditions. Repeat just before sowing.

Prepare a smooth, clean, and uniform soil surface. Thoroughly water the bed to a uniform moisture level several inches deep. During calm air conditions, broadcast seed using a salt shaker filled with seed. Apply a thin dusting to the bed, then cover the seed with a very thin layer of quartz silica sand. The color contrast between the white sand and the soil will allow visual application of a cover only a few grains deep. Lightly mist the covered seed, and lightly compress the soil and sand cover with a flat soil tamper.

The moisture level of the soil should be maintained in a moist condition until the seeds germinate. A single lay-flat irrigation hose designed for sprinkling/misting and a connection to an irrigation timer set for 2 to 3 ten-minute waterings a day is an easy method to maintain a suitably moist condition.

Sowing Periods

Optimal germination and seedling survival are obtained with an early summer sowing (northern hemisphere) before a period of high ambient temperatures. This is approximately week 27, the first weeks of July, in northwest Oregon. Germination is in 7 to 14 days with 80 to 90% germination rates.

Seedlings are hand weeded as necessary. Loosened gentian seedlings should be immediately pressed back into the soil if disturbed by weeding. If seedling beds are properly prepared, only one or two weedings will be necessary before fall.

After the first killing frost, seedlings are covered for the winter with a half inch of aged horse bedding (50% sawdust [not cedar/redwood], 50% aged horse manure) and a floating row cover. Seedlings are ready for transplanting after the second or third season in a seedling bed.

Direct Sowing Into Production Beds

If seedling plants are being grown in future production beds, thin plants the first season two or three times when seedlings have five to six leaves, to a final spacing of 1 x 2 inches. Thin the second season to a finished density of plants 6 x 6 inches.

Other Sowing Periods

Spring sowings are treated the same as early summer sowings but under PVC tunnel. Second-year seedlings produced in spring are larger than summer sowings but require the protection of a hoophouse for equal germination rates.

Autumn sowings are productive but yield a lower germination rate and higher seedling loss to weedings. Sow the same as early summer, but overwinter the first year with a 4-inch mulch of seed-free straw and a floating row cover. Remove row cover in early spring and weed.

Seedling Transplanting

Gentiana is easily stunted or killed by transplanting or moving. It is one of the first of the hardy perennials to emerge from dormancy in early winter. The optimal time for transplanting or moving is after the plant has experienced its full cold dormancy. In northwestern Oregon, this is week 5 or 6, or approximately the second week of February. Plants that are lifted should be maintained in a cold, moist condition until replanting (32 to 38F cooler). Repeated warming and then cooling can have a stunting effect. Plants do not tolerate long storage in refrigerated coolers. Plants moved during this period seem to experience almost no transplant loss or damage.

To transplant during cold, wet soil conditions, it is optimal to prepare stale production beds the preceding fall for winter planting. Production beds prepared to be weed free like seedling beds above, mulched with a half inch of horse manure bedding, and then covered with solid polypropylene weed barrier, are best. When plants are ready to be planted the polypropylene weed barrier can be removed and seedlings transplanted in even the wet soil conditions of early winter without damaging soil structure and future plant growth.

Divisions

Older plants can be lifted and divided during the same time period described for transplanting seedlings. Plants grow in compact clumps that can be lifted and divided. Optimal divisions will have at least several taproots one inch in diameter and several inches long, with a portion of the crown containing five or more shoots. Divided plants will begin commercial production one season after planting. Plants should not be stored for extended periods of time. Best results are lifting, dividing, and replanting without allowing any warming of the plant material. Divisions do not tolerate shipping where the plant material is allowed to warm beyond 40F.

Field Production

Soil is prepared for production with a year of cover crops. Winter cover crop of vetch/field peas/annual rye is sowed in the fall, and in spring when in full flower, the crop is flailed and immediately tilled or preferably spaded in. Successive crops of buckwheat are sown for up to three crops during spring and summer. The first crop of buckwheat is left to grow until about 10% of the flowers have hard brown seeds. The cover crop is then flailed and immediately spaded in. This is repeated for a second crop. The final crop should be flailed and tilled before any seed has set in the flowers. Soil structure is improved, stable humus is increased, and weed pressure is greatly reduced by competition from the successive cover crops. Since *Gentiana* can remain in production for up to a decade, it is important to properly prepare production fields in a manner that establishes long-term fertility, proper soil structure and drainage, elimination of any hardpans, and weed competition.

After cover cropping, the production area is top dressed with a half to one inch of finished compost and a balanced plant fertilizer. It is then spaded or tilled for bed preparation. Soil should be worked for a uniform particle size with no large clods. Production beds are made with a 36-inch wide flat smooth bed top, sloping sides, and 8-10 inch loft. These beds can be shaped with a bedder. Beds should be separated by at least two-foot wide paths.

Beds should be irrigated and allowed to germinate any weeds, and then flame weeded. Beds are next mulched with a half to one inch composted horse bedding (50% sawdust/50% composted horse manure) or similar mulch. Bed tops are then covered with a woven polypropylene fabric top with a planting matrix of holes 12 inches on center (a row of three 6-inch square holes followed by a stag-

Gentiana makinoi flowers in shades of dark blue, light blue, and white

'Fall Color', a sterile selection

gered row of two 6-inch holes). Paths are covered with a four-foot solid woven polypropylene covering, connecting bed top to bed top. Fabric is secured with 6-inch earth staples placed on the sides every 24 inches.

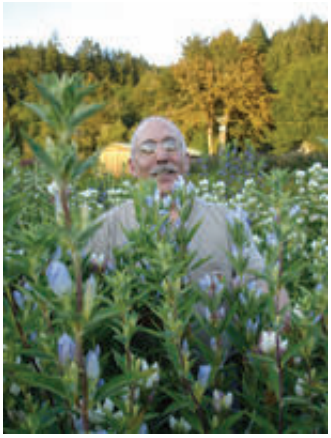
The production area is then completely covered with weed barrier fabric and interconnected to withstand wind lifting the fabric. The bed tops are covered with an additional solid 3-foot top which will be removed in February for direct planting. In this way, no weeds are allowed to gain a foothold over the winter, and with earthworm activity the soil remains friable and ready for planting in the winter. A production field prepared as described can be planted even in extremely wet weather without damaging soil structure.

Production beds are established with either direct-seeded plants, which are thinned to plants 6 to 12 inches on center, or two- to three-year old transplants, which are planted with crowns at soil level into the same spacing.

Plants are then grown in the covered beds for an additional season. In the fall of the first season, after plants are cut back, the weed barrier tops (with planting holes) are removed and the planting area can be top-dressed in compost and plant fertilizer, and mulched again for winter. This can be repeated for up to 10 years or more before plants will need to be lifted and divided.

Each spring plants should be supported with flower mesh netting (Tenax), three feet wide with 6-inch square holes. Net should be supported every 6 feet, with the first layer at 16 inches and the second layer installed at 24 inches and moved up as the stems grow to always have the netting within 16 inches of the top of the stems. Some cultivars can reach over five feet tall.

An Offer from Oregon



Gentiana could be a very profitable crop for ASCFG members, but it has not been produced because it does not like modern cultivation programs. Using an article from John Dole about Japanese methods, I developed a protocol that is really quite easy, if traditional systems of propagation and production are used. Like an ancient Samurai who rejects modernity, *Gentiana* flourishes if grown using traditional methods. Once established, I was able to keep beds productive for nearly twenty years!

I have about two pounds of seed in deep cold storage that I would be happy to share with ASCFG members who wanted to try my protocol. The seed is very expensive (more than $500) if sourced from other suppliers. I would be happy to provide an ounce of seed to members who donate $100 each to the ASCFG Research Foundation. An ounce of seed can fill a 50' x 3' propagation bed, and produce 1500+ starter plants. Seeds to be donated are open pollinated, either dark blue shades, or light blue/white shades.

Paul Sansone, Blissfully Retired
Psansone2@gmail.com

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When plants reach 24 inches, thin the stems to about 20 stems per planting hole or 10 stems per plant. Thinner and shorter stems should have their tops removed, leaving the stem with lower leaves intact. This allows non-harvested stems to help nurture the producing stem and build reserves for the following season.

In cooler growing conditions, it may be necessary to use foliar feeding to eliminate any yellowing of the foliage caused by the plants' inability to metabolize soil nutrients. Care should be exercised to avoid over-feeding, which will make plants attractive to whitefly and aphids.

Harvest and Postharvest Handling

Flowers mature slowly, even during periods of extended heat. Usually a single daily cut, early in the day, is sufficient to stay ahead of the flush.

Gentian flowers mature from the bottom of the flower stem upwards. Optimum time to cut the flower stem is when the tip of the flower stem has good color. This timing must be balanced against the lower blooms becoming too old. Old blooms are identifiable in blue varieties which turn purplish, and white varieties turning pink. Overly mature flowers are prone to develop botrytis during transport. The stem can be cut earlier to avoid this problem, or lower weak blooms can be groomed off before bunching. Wholesalers and florists value color at the tip of the flower stem.

Stem length ranges from 40 inches up to 60. Stems are cut to the length desired for shipping. The straight stiff stems are easy to bunch, fit in shipping boxes or buckets efficiently, and store best in floral solution at 38F. Stems can be brittle and snap during handling, so sleeves and double-banding the bunch can prevent losses. Flowers can be held in the cooler for up to a week after transport and still have a 14-day vase life. Postharvest solutions used for common specialty cut flowers like phlox, delphinium, stock, and veronica are suitable for Gentiana. An antibacterial solution with some sugars for flower food like Chrysal works well.

Depending on the cultivar, bloom times in western Oregon start about the third week of August and extend into October. Cultivars produce a single flush of flowers each season, extending over a two- to three-week period. Depending on its age, 20 to 50 stems are produced by each plant. As they age, the number of stems produced increases and the caliper size of the individual stems decreases. Beds can remain productive for up to twenty years, but older plants will require thinning of blooms in spring to maintain desirable stem caliper. If production plants are lifted and divided at the proper time of year, plantings can be maintained indefinitely.

American Takii's New Aster Series, Fujimi

A must-try this year, the Fujimi Series will invigorate your late production months.

Allison Zeeb

Cut Flower Product Development

With fields freshly tilled and seeds spilling across work tables, spring is finally here. For those in the northern climates, the birds are finally back and with them the beckoning to get your boots dirty once more.

Although spring and summer are geared for planting, there is one season that needs to be remembered during spring's late sowing, and that's fall—the season with crunching leaves, crisp air, and summer production winding down. Many fall-blooming flowers need to get a head start in late spring or early summer.

Asters are the pinnacle of fall, and they provide new ways to extend your cut flower production. Often used as statement pieces for front porches, they may also be presented in floral arrangements, farmers' market buckets, or freshly picked from the field.

American Takii's new aster series, Fujimi, brings colorful disks of flowers for autumn. As a spray aster (120-145 days), each flower is packed with long petals, giving it a lush, three-dimensional shape. This flower is a perfect pop of color as well as an eye-catching piece with fall undertones.

It is easy to be engulfed by the intensity and color contained on a single spray of Fujimi, where a stem can hold dozens of individual flowers. One of the critical features of this series is that it's highly resistant to fusarium. Takii's breeders have been working for several years to develop a variety that can perform under the most extreme conditions. This series was also bred to grow upright before plants begin to branch, producing sprays of colors in coral rose, purple, and scarlet. With small leaves and reduced basal branching, these stems are perfect for high-density planting to get the most out of your field.

Recommended sowing is under long-day conditions, as vegetative growth requires high light. Plants will flower in 120 to 145 days when sown in spring, and 145 to 170 days when sown in fall. Suggested for high-density planting compared to other asters with 4"x4" spacing.

American Takii, Inc. began operations in 1982, founded by its parent company, Takii & Company, Limited. Headquartered in Kyoto, Japan, Takii started its proud history in 1835 growing vegetables and distributing seeds to farmers. Many of Takii's vegetable and flower hybrids have won numerous awards, establishing its reputation for outstanding plant breeding. At American Takii Inc. we work diligently to uphold the high quality standards and innovative research started years ago by Takii & Company Limited. American Takii's wholesale dealers are located in the United States, Canada, Central America, and Mexico. Please visit our website at www.takii.com, for information regarding our comprehensive cut flower products or to find a dealer near you.

Callistephus
Fujimi
Fusarium resistant
Small leaves and reduced basal branching make Fujimi ideal for high density planting
Bred to grow up-right before plants begin to branch producing sprays of blooms
Each flower is packed with vibrantly colored, long petals giving each spray an amazing intensity and volume of color
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Carolyn Snell Designs
carolyn@snellfamilyfarm.com

Setting and Holding Boundaries

Greetings from Maine! I had a very nice winter attending conferences and learning so many tidbits to help me plan better and work more wisely this year. One of the tricky aspects of being a farmer florist is setting and holding boundaries.

I have struggled with protecting my time with all the correspondence, customization, and responsiveness clients require to book flowers. Over the last couple years I have closed in on some tricks to contain the florist part of your business so it doesn't eclipse the farmer part. I spoke about this at the Wedding Floral pre-conference of this year's "Flowering in the North" meeting in Portland, Maine that happened in January.

This is an example of "berries and cream" palette that Carolyn sends to to prospective clients. Photo by Jamie Mercurio.

A major part of setting and holding boundaries is about communicating your needs and expectations clearly and sticking to them. I like to refer to this as "setting the tone." Stay professional. Project experience. Start sentences with "In my experience," "We've found that," "We need," or "We require," etc. This is also about playing the role of the expert in the conversation. You set the pace, you run the meeting. I like to ask open-ended questions about the vibe of the wedding, but very specific questions about the pieces folks need and what they have in mind. I'm more likely to sort of suggest two options and see how they respond than just ask what they had in mind for vessels, for example.

In order to communicate the work you're going to do for your clients you need to have a good handle on your style and be able to explain it clearly in ways that will filter your prospective clients. Write a couple sentences about your design style to put on your website, and use those to respond to each inquiry. For example, my design style is "seasonal and spontaneous with lots of texture and greenery." If someone is looking for a cube of hydrangeas (and it's fine if that's what they are looking for) they might notice that my style is not their style and will seek another florist. Or if they don't notice that I will refer back to my design style and refer them to another florist. In my area, demand for floral design is high enough that I don't need or want to take on each job that I can so I prefer to pass on events that are not a good style match for me.

The sooner we say no to a job we don't want, the better everyone's life is. It took me a while to learn this. I used to feel sad that I had to say no to customers, so I delayed myself in breaking that news. That just made my life more stressful because I still needed to deliver the message and the client's work finding another designer was also delayed. Being prompt with a negative reply is very professional, and if you can also refer another florist you are potentially helping everyone. Remember, you're the expert on the work you do.

These are great reasons for turning down a job:

- If you are already booked and don't have the capacity for the job.
- If they are rude at all.
- If they ask for something that is not your style.
- If the job is out of your delivery zone.
- If they are asking for something that is impossible.

I used to feel guilty about responding to any of these. Now I feel excited to have decided and for that interaction to be over. Usually I refer all clients I'm turning away to other florists in the area who use local flowers, especially if the designers buy stems from me.

At the same time as we reply to each inquiry with our style statement, we include some rough pricing. This is not custom pricing at all, but it gives folks a range of what to expect for bouquets, centerpieces, arbor work, and wearables. If this range is out of the customer's range, we have saved each other a lot of time. I also include some inspirational photos of color combinations that work well for me so we can speak the same language of color in the consultation. I like to keep those descriptions as wide as possible so I have the most flexibility when it comes time to execute the job.

How much of your life are clients buying when they hire you? Boundaries are so important to protect your time and brain space. People who are getting married love feeling connected to the people who are growing and designing their flowers. They love feeling as though they have hired their new friends. Our Instagram accounts help them think they know us and we are friends. At the same time, I work hard to filter folks from actually being part of my day to day life, because I want to only really be selling my design skills during the planning process and the week of the event. After that it's basically over.

I think it's better to err on the side of too private than not private enough, so I recommend declining Facebook friend requests from clients, I don't follow back wedding clients on Instagram, and I don't want to get notifications about their Pinterest boards. This is a slippery, muddy slope, folks, and I have found that my life is much happier if I focus my attention to the planning of the event florals through just one portal with one key person. For me, I like to work via email (rather than phone calls and texts) and I prefer a well-curated vision board with good verbal descriptions over their Pinterest boards.

I like to break client care into two stages: landing the client and producing the event. When you're negotiating the initial estimate, response time should be quick. The client needs to know what's possible and about how much it will cost so they can secure your services. In the month leading up to the event you need to know certain details so you can make sure you get paid on time and your production lists are complete. Between these two stages, I want radio silence because that's when we are growing the flowers! Now that I know that that's what I want, I tell my clients just that: "Your flowers are now booked. The next stage is checking in one month prior to your event."

One of my favorite phrases to use when someone is pushing a boundary is "I'm sorry to report that we don't have the capacity to take that on." You're welcome to use that to free yourself from anything from making more garland than you want to working with an ingredient you don't grow, to traveling farther than you want to, or adding in an additional meeting that is not needed.

Maybe this column has felt a little like a therapy session. I'm not sorry if that's the case, because I think we all need help learning to communicate clearly. Sometimes it takes work to decide what we want and how to communicate that, but that work will pay off with every event we book for 2019 and beyond.

Happy planting and growing! I hope to see many of you up here in southern Maine in July at our "In the Thick of It" farm tour meeting.

MID-ATLANTIC

Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia

Lisa Ziegler
The Gardener's Workshop
lisa@shoptgw.com

How's your farm holding up in these times of crazy weather? Across North America many got doses of weather this past season that isn't what they would consider the norm. Heavy snow in unsuspecting areas, nonstop rain, rising rivers, and temperatures reaching new lows and highs. But are there really norms anymore?

Swamp harvest

I'm thinking that we should realign our thinking to expect the unexpected. Perhaps one of the greatest qualities farmers can possess is their ability to roll with the punches, weather punches especially. Weather is one of those things that as much as we want to, we cannot control it.

The most challenging times of farming for me was during our high production years. Pedal to the metal full-time farming with all the fixings: employees, lots of customer commitments, and all the financial obligations that are rolled up in all that business.

Weather issues on harvest days made me a crazy woman. I scheduled everything so tight that more than one hiccup in the schedule and our week spiraled into chaos. Maybe not such a good plan for someone who grows everything outdoors in the field. But I always tried to have a backup plan to pull us through.

Most of the time it all worked out fine. We harvested, sold, and delivered on time, and everything was right in my world. Rain on harvest days is just one of many potential weather impacts that can interfere with day-to-day business on a flower farm. This list could, in fact, be endless.

Britches down

This whole "You're messing with me, weather." concept has brought a couple of questions to the front of my mind these days:

- Are the good, smooth sailing times worth the crazy, pull-my-hair out times?
- How can a person manage this risky business and not just survive financially, but to manage in a way that it doesn't make her or him crazy?

My personal answers to these questions are:

Yes. The reward is greater than the rocky roads traveled! And I manage the craziness by trying to always have a backup plan. I no longer romanticize this business. I plan for the worst and work toward the best.

Planning for the "what if" has become a part of my business life. Trying not to go overboard, but trying to do what I can. For instance, if I fall plant cool-season hardy annuals that are winter hardy in my region, I should have enough row cover and hoops on hand to cover them in the event of a polar vortex. True story: my email box was stacked with folks facing weather forecasts that had them in knots because they had zero row covers and a garden full of beautiful hardy annuals with no way to protect them.

Risk assessment and forward thinking isn't the dreamy part of this business, but a backup plan can go a long way toward sleeping better and building a success business.

Row cover backups in place

SOUTHEAST

Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee

Val Schirmer
Three Toads Farm
vschirmer3@gmail.com

It's Not Nice to Fool Mother Nature, but We Have to Try!

Rain, rain, and MORE rain! It looks like it's going to be a repeat of 2018—pests included.

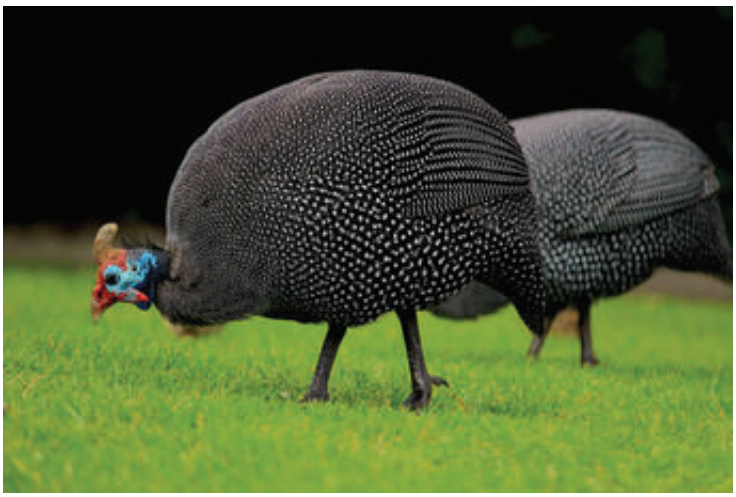
Last year was such a hard one for so many of us in the Southeast, especially in terms of weather and pests, and 2019 is setting up to be just as bad, if not worse, with record rains so far this year and top of record annual rain fall last year.

As I got ready to write this column this was weighing heavily on my mind, so I decided to ask our Southeast Region members what they're planning to do differently, do more of and do less of, to try to get ahead of Mother Nature. It gives me fresh hope to see their smarts and tenacity!

Hope springs eternal for Southeast Region flower farmers, hit hard by weather and pests in 2018 — and hoping for a "return to normal" in 2019! Photo by Eileen Tongson.

Strategies farmers are using: building their soil, adding raised beds, more covered space. Photo by Renee Clayton, Wild Scallions Farm

- *Renee Clayton, Wild Scallions Farm, Timberlake, North Carolina* is working to make her farm more resilient to what Mother Nature is throwing her way, including more covered space with two new caterpillar tunnels. She continues to build the soil after starting with red clay that now has progressed to clayey loam via cover crops and mulch. She says it's much more resilient and so much quicker to be able to work after heavy rain. More permaculture beds and diverse perennials, which also gives better habitat for beneficials.
- *Jennifer Logan, Whimsy Flower Farm, Blairsville, Georgia* is shooting for sustainable low-till methods, such as cover crops, to improve her soil's ability to absorb water. She will also be trying out some ways to "crimp" over a cover crop and plant zinnias directly into a crimped or mowed stand of rye, the goal being to increase the soil's fluffiness so rainfall filters in and drains away instead of racing over the top of her beds. Crimping is simply allowing a cover crop, such as winter rye, to grow until it's in a stage likely to stay down when smashed, so it will suppress weeds for more than a month and conserve moisture … and you just plant plugs right into it. Want to know more?
  - Crimper example: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuvSbmumgcI
  - South Carolina experiment last year: https://www.farmers.gov/media/blog/2019/02/27/farmer-scientists-five-trials-managing-soil-health
  - This one is long but AMAZING: Gabe Brown Nebraska farmer: https://kisstheground.com/the-5-keys-to-building-healthy-soil/
- *Andrew Moman, Twin Rose Farm, Murfreesboro, Tennessee* is trialing methods to fight the heat and insects, and improve harvest. White on black film on their rows to cut down on heat absorption. Shade cloth helped a lot last year on their high tunnels. Smaller, more frequent planting to allow them to remove crops affected by heat more quickly. More varieties for drying so they can be less worried about perfect harvests and get yield from each crop. For pests they're using more aggressive methods to get (and stay) in front of problems: proactively spraying neem, PyGanic and a few new things for bugs and powdery mildew; several rounds of beneficials (ladybugs, lacewings, and predatory mites) in their high tunnels, and mulching pathways to keep moisture in, stay cooler, and give pests less area to hide.
- *Lis Murray, Hawk & Sparrow Flowers, Stanley, North Carolina* says she's in a holler, so her flower and berry rows are planted on contour. Her biggest problem is Bermuda grass. This year they're tilling in the worst areas, covering with a silage tarp, and hoping North Carolina heat will burn it up.
- *Sara Brown, Meadowview Flowers, Princeton, Kentucky* is raising 15 guineas to help deal with insects, especially during dahlia season, where she's had a lot of pressure from grasshoppers, earwigs, cucumber and Japanese beetles (sound familiar?). She's been bagging dahlias but still has damage when insects are hiding when the bags go on.
- *Margaret Stokes, Flowers Local Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee* is also using organza bags on her dahlias.
- *Paula Fisher, Garden Bee Flower Farm, Walnut Cove, North Carolina* lost 400' of sunflowers due to cloudy days, rain, and humidity caused by Hurricane Florence. Now she's going to use more downy mildew-resistant sunflowers and apply an organic fungicide like Serenade, alternating with an organic copper fungicide during wet, humid weather.



Sara Brown of Meadow View Flowers has added 15 guinea hens to her farm, hoping they will help battle the beetles, grasshoppers and earwigs. Photo by thehappychickencoop.com

• *Mary Stephanie Kilroe, Dancing Hearts Homestead, Monroe, Georgia* is on the lookout for insects, especially army worms, and will have Bt and spinosads ready. Last summer pests made hundreds of flowers unsaleable. She also lost crops from heavy wind and rain and is going to use netting to horizontally trellis every flower crop.

• *Donna Mills, Floral & Hardy Farm, Lexington, South Carolina* is going to try to grow eucalyptus again after the eucalyptus beetles ruined her entire crop last year, including 30-foot tall trees.

• *Linda Doan, Aunt Willies Wild Flowers, Blountville, Tennessee* says she's keeping their hoophouses filled all year with no summer lull. If wind, rain, drought happens, more florals will be inside a controlled environment.

• *Anna Phythyon, Franklin Flower Farm, Franklin, North Carolina* says they're entering their first full-time season as a commercial grower. Their strategy is to master seed starting and succession planting, always having new plants ready to plug into the field if it washes out.

• *Susan Wright, Shady Grove Gardens, Vilas, North Carolina* says for her, it's not the growing she's focused on for 2019, it's all about the sale: keeping better records, working on efficiency and photography.

As hard as last year was with the weather and insect pressure, running our businesses—successfully and happily, even with pure joy and fun—has got to be the biggest challenge we face. If you couldn't attend the ASCFG Denver meeting held February 18-19, be sure to take a look at the videos and slides as soon as they're posted in the Members Only section of the ASCFG web site. "The Business of Flower Farming" was jam-packed with tons of great information that you can take advantage of **this year**.

Cathy Jones of Perry-winkle Farm in Chapel Hill, North Carolina says she had a few positive outcomes during all the wet weather, including a good bit of time spent reviewing those presentations from previous years' meetings.

For this last section, I've included some insights gleaned from the Team Flower Conference "Rise and Shine" held in Waco, Texas, March 4-6.

• *Julio Freitas, The Flower Hat, Bozeman, Montana* "The Six Pillars of Flower Farming" Julio's #1 pillar, Careful Crop Selection, should be front and center in our planning

Piedmont Wholesale Flowers Market in Durham is a cooperative of eleven flower farms in central N.C. Photo by Sandra Seagroves

every single year, as growing conditions, trends, availability, and varieties evolve. Be mindful and focused on hard-to-ship and hard-to-find varieties. After that, ask yourself, "Is this variety going to make a difference in my designs?" Will it make a difference in your *customers'* designs? If it's not a standout, consider not growing it, or just grow it for yourself.

- *Lauren Wiebe, Stone House Creative, Winnipeg, Canada* "Client Communication" Lauren's premise is that a lot of client-based issues are the result of our own failures to effectively communicate. That holds true, I think, whether the "clients" are designers/florists, wholesalers, brides, CSA members or farmers' market customers. Educating our clients and prospective clients on our processes will make the difference. Think about the effectiveness of your communication process. What's working well? Is there a stage where the email back-and-forth always seems to start? Do you seem to lose prospective business at a specific point? She suggests creating email templates to streamline, systematize, and organize your business. What a simple idea! It will save time, ensure a high level of service and keep your brand personality and messaging consistent.
- *Natalie Gill, Native Poppy, San Diego, California* "Lessons in Business Expansion" Natalie is exactly the kind of person I forever want to work with, for, or around—authentic, kind, fun, and smart. Her real topic: building a business that works for you, not because of you. Beyond building a team, the secret to this lies in one word: Systems. "Sweat builds you a job, systems build you a business." How do you get started? It's easy: checklists. Checklists for every single procedure. Her employees give input into each one, identify checklists that need to be created, and are accountable for using them. This is how her business not only survived but thrived when she crushed her heel and was bedridden. It's also the way you'll be able to step away and, oh my gosh, even take a vacation in the midst of the growing season.

NORTH AND CENTRAL

Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Wyoming

Jamie Rohda
Harvest Home
harvesthomeflowers@gmail.com

Happy Spring! I hope you're all well on your way to another glorious growing season! This past long, cold winter has given me ample time to reflect on the 2018 season and plan for 2019. Learning opportunities and time for research have been abundant and I'm feeling ready to tackle this coming season.

Unfortunately, winter weather caused us to cancel our little gathering of the Midwest Farmer Florist Collaborative in Omaha. It was very disappointing as January is such a great time to dig into business planning. February brought the next great opportunity for learning in Denver at the "Focus on the Business of Cut Flowers" event. Wow, what a great lineup of speakers to get us all thinking about how we run our floral ventures.

After years of attending conferences and coming home with copious numbers of notes, I've finally determined that I'm much better off if I can take away just a handful of very obtainable goals. As an ASCFG member you will have access to videos of many of the sessions, but in case you don't have time to watch them, here is a speed version of a few things that I want to apply to our business.

Fun times meeting up with a few of the North and Central Region members.

- Check on the profitability of a few crops. Wondering if I'm making any money on a specific crop is always in the back of my mind, but who really has time to give it much thought during the rush of the season? Diane Szukovathy of Jello Mold Farm got me thinking about it again and I've decided that if I can do crop costing/enterprise budget on at least three of my top crops this year I will be happy. That will be three more than I did last year! And if you're wondering what crop costing is it's just a fancy way of saying "How much money do I actually make on this crop after expenses?"
- Take at least one step towards better bookkeeping. Thank you Laura Beth Resnick of Butterbee Farm for that little prod! Our little business started as just selling a few veggies from one small table at a tiny farmers' market, and I feel like parts of our bookkeeping are still at that level. We didn't really have a plan when starting our business, and now going backwards and trying to develop one is not always easy.
- Get some legal advice. Once again Poppy Davis has convinced me about the legal end of running our business. New tax laws have changed things up a bit and consulting with a professional is the only way that I think we'll feel comfortable with where we are. We'd much rather grow a few extra flowers to pay a professional than to try to wrap our brains around it all.
- Improve profitability by decreasing expenses. That bit of advice came from Lily Schneider and sounds so easy but is so hard to implement. With all the new varieties of seeds, plants, bulbs, and tubers it's pretty hard to say no and decrease expenses in that area, but I'm going to be keeping an eye out for ways that money is leaking away from our farm.
- Make sure we're running a professional business in all our interactions with our customers. Steve and Gretel from Sunny Meadows Flower Farm, and Anna Jane Kocon with Little State Flower Company all had some great points on dealing with our customers, keeping it professional and making it work for all involved.

I encourage you to pick one area of your business this year you think needs improvement and focus on it. There are still two more ASCFG learning opportunities this year. Do your business a favor and attend one of them if you can.

It was so nice to get together with a few of the North and Central Region members while in Denver, to make new flower friends and put a face and farm name together! Hopefully our paths will cross again in the future.

After all of the great sessions in Denver my brain was feeling a bit overloaded but the board meeting was just what I needed to get super pumped about the future of the ASCFG. Jennie Love has stepped into the role of president of our organization and, along with the other board members, is putting many new projects and plans into motion. I can't wait to see how they all develop!

As I write this, our dahlia tubers are still looking great in storage and we'll be starting to pull them out of our cooler soon. Time to wake those babies up! We've invested in a few new varieties this year and as always, I can't wait to see them bloom. A picture is great but there's nothing quite like seeing the first bloom open on a new variety. With the huge increase in the number of flower farmers in recent years, the demand for dahlias has skyrocketed. It was like a treasure hunt this winter seeking out those coveted tubers from near and far! I hope you were all able to find a few new treasures also.

Waking up the dahlia tubers

After taking a few years off we are once again participating in the ASCFG Cut Flower Seed Trial. If you've never done this, and you've got a bit of growing experience, I'd encourage you to give it a whirl. It's so exciting to be involved with bringing new varieties to the commercial market. Those Vincent sunflowers we all love? We trialed those before they were commercially available and we gave them rave reviews! Of course there are always some duds too but that's what keeps it interesting. Trialing involves diligence and record keeping but it's rewarding to see everyone's results at the end of the season, and know that you played a part in getting beautiful, new varieties out into the flowering world. Here's hoping you have a flower-filled summer!

These Vincents have earned a permanent place in our gardens.

SOUTH AND CENTRAL

Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Louisiana,New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, and Utah

Shanti Rade
Whipstone Farm
info@whipstone.com

The Beauty of the SOP

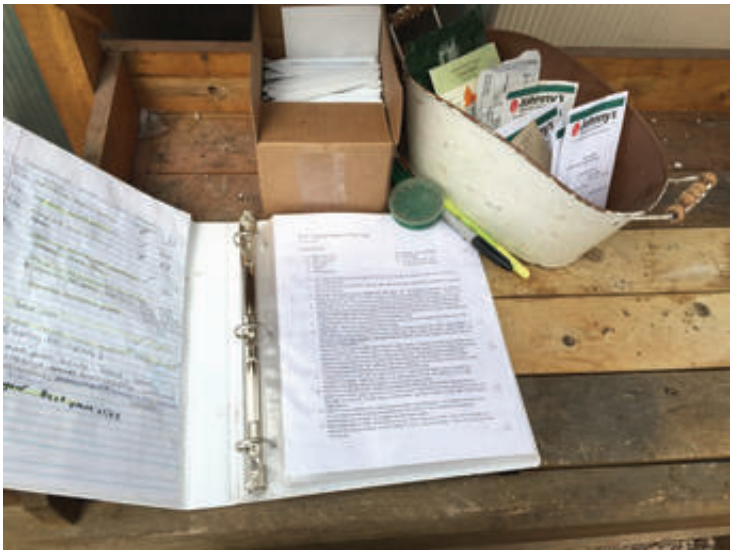
I'm still feeling pretty revved up from the ASCFG meeting in Denver. I gained so much insight about how to refine my business, and as always the networking was great. I loved talking to so many flower farmers that I met for the first time, and seeing many old friends. If you didn't make it, definitely check out the video replays.

Unfortunately this time of year is "go time" on our farm. Days are full with planting, weeding, office work, training new employees, markets, and so much more, that a lot of the big picture/back end dreams that were sparked in Denver will have to wait until the slow season to come to life. For me, making big changes to my business is a slow process. I have to ruminate on new ideas, research them, talk to friends, cost things out, make decisions, and then, finally I can pull the trigger. But I am really excited to see what I can actually implement over the next year.

At the "Business of Flower Farming", Carolyn Snell and I presented on how to manage a farm crew. Moving from farmer to boss is not an easy transition in the development of a small business, and we wanted to share some of the things we've learned along the way—everything from legal issues to how to keep people happy and provide the kind of employment that will keep them around as long as possible. Building a strong team is essential to building a thriving farm business.

One of the most important things I've learned about managing a team is that people need clear direction. Most people want to do a good job at whatever they are doing. When they aren't doing a good job, most likely the root cause is that they aren't given the proper direction or resources. If they really don't care about doing a good job, figure that out right away and let them go.

As the boss, you can't be everywhere, always. And while I much prefer to do everything myself, there is no way at our scale that this can happen anymore. I tend to be the kind of person who has a million things going on at any given moment. I'm very scattered and I will rattle off long lists of important task that I want executed with lots of tiny (important!) details. And I used this method for an embarrassing number of years. But, I have learned that this a terrible way to direct team members. I absolutely abhor writing things down in an orderly, organized, permanent fashion, especially if I already know how to do them myself. But, I have been forced to make changes. For the better.



Shanti's Standard Operating Procedures manual is essential to her business.

I now rely heavily on the SOP, or Standard Operating Procedure. This is just a written protocol for a specific task. If there are pictures or videos to go along with it, all the better. Read the book *The Lean Farm* by Ben Hartman for much more on this topic.

Farming has to be efficient to be profitable. An SOP can help make work clear and efficient, and it gives your employees a blueprint for consistency and good performance of a task. You can track who does what, in what amount of time, and what the results are. It can reduce hurt feelings when there is a set standard to fall back on. It also aids in performance evaluations.

Some examples of SOP's we use on our farm:

- Mixing potting soil
- Seeding in plug trays with the vacuum seeder
- Greenhouse watering
- Direct seeding with the Jang seeder
- How to lay drip irrigation
- Pinching
- Flower harvest, crop by crop
- Farmers' market setup, execution, and breakdown
- Dahlia digging, dividing and storage

The options are endless, as you can imagine. It can feel a bit overwhelming. But start with just one and build your library over time. Be specific in the title and the scope of each SOP. Include the equipment, skill level, and number of people needed to perform the task. Specify an order in which to complete the tasks and an appropriate time frame, along with any safety tips. If the SOP gets too long, break it up into separate tasks. It's hard for people to remember too many steps accurately. Post an ab-

breviated version in an appropriate spot: checklists, flowcharts, and short videos work great for this purpose. A more detailed, written version may be used for employee training or as part of an employee manual.

To develop an SOP from scratch, first study the task and envision what improvements can be made. Check to see what other farms do for the same task. Trial several ways to accomplish the same task and agree on the best method for speed, safety, and simplicity. While I generally write the initial SOP, I then give it over to the crew for feedback. I involve them in the ongoing development of an SOP to make sure we are actually doing the job as stated. I often myself totally unaware that the crew is doing something to make the job easier or better, and I can fold that into the written document. Or I find big gaps in the written protocol and the reality of the task and revise accordingly.

As the boss, you can't be everywhere, always. And while I much prefer to do everything myself, there is no way at our scale that this can happen anymore.

SOPs are crucial for training new employees on a job, and great for cross-training so employees can easily fill in for one another. They allow your crew to work by themselves confidently. They can help keep employees safe and may provide legal protection if an employee gets hurt. I have found that creating SOPs for our farm has actually made the work I do personally way more consistent. If it's written down, and I expect others to do it the right way, I am more inclined to do the same.

This is probably the least exciting, least flowery Regional Report ever! Sorry for that. But this small tool has made a huge difference on our farm. I hope it helps someone else out there too. Even if you are just thinking of hiring your first part-time helper, do your future self a favor and start writing down your protocols to make the training and efficiency of your employee easier and better.

If you are in my Region and have any feedback, stories to share, questions, issues, you name it, please reach out, I'd love to connect! Wishing you all a bountiful growing season.

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WEST AND NORTHWEST

Alaska, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington

Erin McMullen
Rain Drop Farm
raindropfarm@peak.org

When I stepped into the role of Board member for the ASCFG I really did not know what to expect. After a whirlwind week in Denver I feel the need to let all of my fellow ASCFG members know what a great group of people we have working for us. There's a lot that happens behind the scenes, the boring stuff that has to happen in order to keep this organization moving forward. So, a hearty thank you to each and every person who works so hard, for all that you do and for welcoming me (and my entourage) so warmly.

After Denver, we flew home to get cracking on the next conference, the OSU Small Farms Conference and the PNWCFG Meetup which happened the next weekend.

This is the fourth year I have been involved with the OSU conference, and it has been really neat to watch this relationship blossom. The conference is put on by the OSU Extension service. As one of the original Land Grant universities in the U.S., Oregon State University has a long history of service to the community and outreach through our Extension Services. The Small Farms conference hosts 900-1100 attendees each year.

Cut flowers weren't included in a mainstream way until 2016, when Elizabeth Bryant of Rose Hill Flower Farm was asked to help coordinate a cut flower track. Over the last four years we've expanded our presence at the conference to include three cut flower sessions during the day. Over the years we've had lots of wonderful speakers join us, many of whom are ASCFG members. This year we were fortunate to have Mimo Davis and Miranda Duschack join us.

It's always so interesting to talk to people at this sort of event. They hear that we are flower farmers and many times I can see the mental eye roll, as if they're thinking, "Right, you grow flowers, but are you really a farmer?" Then they attend one of our sessions and you can see that understanding occur, that yes, flower farming is a thing and we're doing it, and doing it well. So a big thank you to all of those speakers who have helped over the years to bring the light of flowers to the mainstream farming community!

Tobey Nelson

Our fellow growers in the PNW joined us on Sunday, after the Small Farms Conference, for a deep dive into flower farming. This year we celebrated five years of the Pacific Northwest Cut Flower Growers group and meetup with a new venue and greatly expanded class offerings. We were inspired by the top-notch conferences, like the ASCFG, to enhance our session offerings to try to include classes that would cater to newer farmers, but also something for the more experienced farmers in our ranks. This took the form of classes on crop profitability and analysis, a session on hiring employees and writing contracts (facilitated by one of our growers who also happens to be an adjunct law professor!), and a session on integrated pest management.

Alongside talks on season extension, woodies and roses, and crop planning, we offered a two-part sustainable floristry class led by the fabulous Tobey Nelson, of Tobey Nelson Events in Seattle. This is a topic that is near and dear to Tobey, and many of our attendees and the knowledge that she shared was phenomenal. During the hands-on session the class created an amazing piece of "foam-free floristry" which is something that we are seeing more and more traction for here in the PNW, and hope to see across the nation as we start to see more and more people looking for better, more sustainable ways to put together large-scale floral installations.

The Pacific Northwest Flower Growers Met in February.
Photo by Kathleen Barber.

With 125 attendees, this year was the largest group that we've hosted for the PNW Meetup. It was wonderful, and exhausting, and invigorating. Farmers, florists, and industry reps from five states and British Columbia joined us. We ate, drank, learned, shared, laughed, and enjoyed each other's company. It's something that I highly recommend—getting together with similarly-minded people to learn is never time wasted. So, if you have the opportunity to go to a conference, meetup, class, drink night, garden tour, do it! There's nothing more inspiring than learning!

CANADA

Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, and Saskatchewan

Janis Harris
Harris Flower Farm
janisandmarkharris@hotmail.com

And on the 8th day God looked down on his planned paradise and said, "I need a caretaker!" So, God made a farmer!

God said I need somebody to get up before dawn and milk cows and work all day in the fields, milk cows again, eat supper and then go to town and stay past midnight at a meeting of the school board. So, God made a farmer!

I need somebody with strong arms. Strong enough to rustle a calf, yet gentle enough to deliver their own grandchild. Somebody to call hogs, tame cantankerous machinery, come home hungry and make their own lunch because their spouse is working hard too. So, God made a farmer!

God said "I need somebody that can shape an ax handle, shoe a horse with a hunk of car tire, make a harness out of hay wire, feed sacks, and shoe scraps. And…who, at planting time and harvest season, will finish their forty hour week by Tuesday noon. Then, pain'n from "tractor back", put in another seventy two hours. So, God made a farmer!

God had to have somebody willing to ride the ruts at double speed to get the hay in ahead of the rain clouds and yet stop on mid-field and race to help when they see the first smoke from a neighbor's place. So, God made a farmer!

God said, "I need somebody strong enough to clear trees, heave bales and yet gentle enough to tame lambs and wean pigs and tend the pink combed pullets…and who will stop the mower for an hour to mend the broken leg of a meadow lark. So, God made a farmer!

It had to be somebody who'd plow deep and straight… and not cut corners. Somebody to seed and weed, feed and breed…and rake and disc and plow and plant and tie the fleece and strain the milk. Somebody to replenish the self feeder and then finish a hard day's work with a five mile drive to church.

Somebody who'd bale a family together with the soft strong bonds of sharing, who'd laugh and then sigh…and then respond with smiling eyes, when their child says they wants to spend their life "doing what their parent does". So, God made a farmer!

No matter your religious background I hope this poem still speaks to you. It lays out how hard a farmer works. I'm sure you can't deny that you work very hard at your job. The author of the original poem is unknown but it was first made popular when John Harvey read it at a Future Farmers of America Conference in 1978. Then Dodge recreated it into a Super Bowl commercial. I tweaked the above poem, to make it more gender neutral to reflect the change in agriculture, especially in the small flower farming industry. I am a farmer and darn proud to be. Whenever I read the poem or hear the recording I get goosebumps. I am a woman farmer. A farmer isn't a gender. A farmer can be someone who produces something other than food.

In early February our local farm paper did a Facebook post recognizing Canadian Ag Day. The photo that accompanied it was of 5-6 farmers, all pictured with a food product that they produced. Agriculture is more than food production. I wrote to the *Ontario Farmer* to remind them that not all farmers produce food. I said that I was a farmer who produces "food for the soul". They recognized their omission and on Valentine's Day they posted a few pictures of me and my work. The post with my story ended up being their most popular and was liked and shared hundreds of times. They didn't omit pictures of other types of farmers in their original post on purpose. It is a norm of society that people think of food when they think of a farmer.

We need to think of ourselves as farmers. Don't discount what you do! Flower farming is farming. We are probably more in touch with our land than a farmer who works a thousand acres of wheat. We are in our fields every day. We are harvesting/weeding/planting simultaneously. Many times, we are the end seller of our products too. We are the face the consumer sees. At markets, customers have said to me "Your flowers beds

must be so pretty". I respond and say "Yes, our flower fields are beautiful". Even if you are growing in your backyard, you are a farmer. Make sure people know that. Be a farmer. A farmer isn't the cartoon image of an uneducated country bumpkin.

Farmers in all industries work with very sophisticated equipment. They have to be very knowledgeable about what they are growing or raising. So much of farming is becoming computerized or streamlined. Even spacing charts, succession planting, and seeding schedules are not basic information. It can take some time to wrap your head around those concepts. We are all drawn to cutting-edge plant breeding and always on the quest of the best most profitable way to do something. Introduce yourself as a flower farmer! They say dress for success: that can be a nice pair of jeans and a pair of Blundtstones too!

When you are on the quest to learn the best way to grow a crop or be successful on your balance sheet, make sure you are looking to the right education streams. There are many ways to learn how to do what we do but make sure the source is reputable. There are priceless books, Oscar quality online workshops, and flower friend confidants you can look to. Don't take every bit of advice or information you receive as the gospel truth. Not all learning techniques work for everyone; find the one that fits you best and take it all in fully.

I often read some really bad advice in Facebook groups. It may be correct in Zone 7B but totally different in 5A! Social media can draw us in to the dream but are you getting the full picture? I am proud to work with the ASCFG executive and board members to deliver the best quality information that is applicable and relative to as many of the group as possible. When making decisions about what we will offer to the members we look back to our mission and the reason we exist:

The ASCFG was created to educate, unite, and support commercial cut flower growers. It does this by providing production and marketing information; connecting members through events and communications; supporting floriculture research; and encouraging the purchase and use of locally-grown flowers by the public. Its mission is to help growers produce high-quality floral material, and to foster and promote the local availability of that product.

Janis Harris

Flower farming a great profession to be in, and no one understands the excitement of the first bloom like another flower farmer. Be a smart farmer, one who is cutting edge and very educated about everything flower. Then the public will see you as a farmer, one who is "Out standing in their field."

Testing the Viability Of Peony Production In Warm Climates (Zone 9b)

Lennie Larkin, B-Side Farm

Raised beds are essential.

Peonies are spaced three feet apart in the row.

Objectives

1) To test the viability of peonies as a cut flower crop in warm regions, and evaluating variety selection and different planting depths.
2) To finally have some research to point to, cutting down on anecdotes and emails that fly around questioning "Can I grow peonies, too?"
3) To use these findings to encourage small growers in warm climates to find and test crops that may give them a valuable product in a highly competitive, flooded (no pun intended) market.
4) To demonstrate the process of field trials to small, newer growers who are too intimidated to apply for research grants.

Progress

In 2018, we planted all 2,400 peonies, spanning 16 varieties, in a half-acre plot. These were our methods.

1) On May 31st, spread 40 yards of compost amended with 500 pounds oyster lime, 200 pounds gypsum, and 250 pounds potassium sulphate, and disked it all in.
2) Spread sorghum-sudangrass as a cover crop, and watered it overhead once a week all summer.
3) Participated in some light agri-tourism by inviting friends to run through the ten-foot tall grass with me. Considered making a horror movie, but got too busy. But it was terrifying in there.
4) On September 16th, mowed and disked it in. I let it grow a little too long, and it started to get a bit woody and set some seed. Next time I would mow it while still it's still growing, about knee-high, then continue to let grow.
5) Watered the ground a few times to encourage it to break down. The soil had started to dry down rapidly.
6) On October 26th, I hired a farmer to build raised beds which will help with drainage.
7) On November 1st, we began planting the peonies.
8) We planted in 96' long beds, two rows per bed, peonies spaced 3' apart in row, in holes burned into landscape fabric.
9) Most were planted just under the soil surface. One bed was planted 4" deep to test whether this has an impact on flowering. We suspect that peonies planted at a traditional 3-4" deep will not flower as well for us here in this mild climate.

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Then it rained, and rained, and rained, all winter. We began pumping water out from the lowest spot in the field once per week, and brought a drainage expert to the field to help assess the situation and make a plan for the future. When it dries down in spring, we will reassess and begin to dig some trenches.

Current Status

The field is still completely saturated, and we've already had one of the worst, wettest years on the books. Most peonies have emerged and are about 6" tall. Most look healthy, though we're acutely aware of some early signs of botrytis and are beginning a spray regimen. This water will definitely present problems, but the extent is still unclear, and whether botrytis or just lack of vigor will be my main problems. I'm expecting both. But I remain hopeful, in the starry-eyed optimism of first-generation farmers under 40 everywhere.

Starry-eyed optimists even after planting 2,400 peonies.

Viability of Begonia Foliage for Floral Design and Viability of Strawberries for Floral Design

Laura Beth Resnick, Butterbee Farm

Photo by Seana Shuchart.

We're grateful for the ASCFG Grower Grant to trial strawberries and begonias for cutting. Neither project went as planned, but we learned a lot and are excited to share our results.

We wanted to try both projects without using a heated greenhouse, since most of us are growing either in the field or in unheated tunnels, and we wanted the results to be useful to the ASCFG membership. The flooding rains and humidity of 2018 made outdoor growing difficult, and though we did not use a heated space at all, we definitely veered far away from our original grant proposals. Many thanks to the ASCFG for letting us throw our game plan to the wind in order to get some results.

Overall, we had the best success with strawberries, which are easy to grow in variable conditions and produce sellable fruit as well as foliage. Begonias were tough and demand more attention than we can often provide. Please feel free to reach out with any questions on either project at butterbeefarm@gmail.com.

Strawberries

Our goals were: 1. To discover the best out of four day-neutral varieties for cuts, 2. To test different harvest methods and timings, and 3. To gather feedback from our customers on whether strawberries are a desired item from local growers.

The deluge of rain we got in Maryland in 2018 stunted the berries' growth; the fruit came on slowly and was very small. We simply did not have luck on our side with this project, but since our mission was to discover whether growers without greenhouses can successfully sell strawberries as cuts, we chose not to move the berries under cover despite the rain. We'll keep testing the strawberries in 2019, but will use our tunnels with the hopes of getting better results in case it's another wet year. In the meantime, we learned a lot from 2018's outdoor trial.

On week 16, we potted up 100 bare root strawberries into one-gallon pots. We used 75% mushroom compost and 25% Pro-Mix. We got 25 plants each of four varieties, some from Nourse Farms ('Mara des Bois' and 'Evie 2') and some from Johnny's Selected Seeds ('Seascape' and 'Albia'). All were everbearing strawberries. We put the pots in crates for easier handling, and set the crates on cold frames where they received morning shade and afternoon sun. We gave each pot a little chicken manure fertilizer right on the soil surface.

We got plenty of berries in late May and June, but they were short—on stems about two inches long—and we didn't feel they were worth cutting for sale. It seemed as though the heavy rain was delaying plant growth. We deadheaded (er, we ate the berries) to encourage more fruiting on longer stems. On week 24, we finally decided to try putting some berries on

our availability list: five whole stems about 6" long. We listed them at $10 for 5 stems, or $2 per stem. We put another five stems on the availability list the following week.

To our surprise, given the short stems, they flew off the availability list immediately, both times to the same florist. Other florists expressed regret that they didn't get to order sooner. The florist who did use them got back to us with rave reviews, and said she wanted us to grow more next season.

More humidity and heavy rain July through October meant that the plants mostly stopped producing fruit. However, we were surprised by how nice the 8" long foliage looked in July, and decided to test it out. It had a great vase life: for about five days it looked as though it had just been cut. We sold six bunches throughout July (10 stems for $7) and again, they flew off the availability list. We could charge more in the future, since it's such an unusual foliage, perhaps up to $9 per bunch. Two florists bought the foliage; one was the same who bought the berries, the other was a new customer.

In August, we noticed that the foliage had started to trail over the edges of the cold frame in tangled 15-20" pieces. Living on the wild side, we decided to cut it for sale, and again four bunches (10 stems for $10) flew off the list to the same florist who bought the berries and foliage.

The rest of the season, the foliage became mottled and purple-spotted. In the future, we will move the berries into a shaded hoophouse during humid and rainy spells to prevent disease. In mid-November, we moved a third of the crates to an unheated hoophouse, a third to a heated greenhouse (minimum 55 degrees at night), and a third stayed on the cold frames. We'll be curious to see which treatment works best for next year's berries.

A note about harvest: the foliage can be cut right into a bucket of water. The vines can be cut as a tangled mass and stuck in water, so long as you let your florists know that they'll be tangly as all get out. The strawberries are simple: we wet a paper towel and wrapped it around the stems, and then put the whole thing in a plastic clamshell. You don't need the clamshell though, so long as you cut the berries the same day as delivery, you could just do the wet paper towel and put the berries in an open box or similar for transport.

If we can keep the plants out of extreme weather, strawberries will be a fantastic addition to our crop plan, and I would recommend them to farmers either with or without greenhouses. Florists who do weddings don't care about ethylene issues since the flowers need to look good for only a day. Unique little touches like a strawberry or an unusual vine are game changers for many of our customers, who are looking for ways to differentiate in the world of Instagram and Pinterest.

Begonias

Our goals were: 1. To compare growing half the begonias on a shaded cold frame and half in a shaded, unheated tunnel, 2. To compare three different Jurassic varieties for stem length, leaf size, and productivity, 3. To report on the average vase life of each variety, and 4. To gather feedback from our customers on whether begonia foliage is a desired item from local growers.

Our begonia trial veered off the train tracks almost immediately. We got several hard freezes after our last frost date in mid April, and no amount of Reemay and shelter in the unheated tunnel could save the stunted plants, which need night temps of at least 55 degrees but more ideally 70 degrees in their early stages.

In mid May we gave up and ordered more plants from Ball Seed, but the nursery didn't have any of our original Jurassic set ('Silver Point', 'Silver Swirl', 'Pink Shades') so instead we got 48 plugs each of 'Dark Mambo', 'Flamenco', and 'Escargot'. After receiving and potting up our plants into quart-sized pots in Pro-Mix with about 20% mushroom compost mixed in, we got the suddenly-it's-really-hot spring characteristic of Maryland. Our unheated propagation tunnel was too hot for the plants even with shade cloth, and the cold frame outside had too much afternoon sun. That's when we decided to throw our original plan completely out the window in order to save the plants.

'Silver Point'

'Dark Mambo'

'Silver Swirl'

Things started to go much better once we moved the plants to the front porch of our house. We put half of each variety in 100% shade, and half of each variety in about 90% shade. The results were clear: every single plant in 100% shade looked healthy by the end of the season, but we lost about one third of the plants in 90% shade.

We watered the plants about once a week during the summer, which seemed about right; they did well being fairly dry most of the time. In August and September, we put some of each variety on our availability list. We cut the stems into mini mason jars. The vase life in water was good (at least 5 days) but not great out of water (less than a day).

Although we didn't completely sell out of cuttable stems, we came close: six different florists bought them despite their extremely short length of only 4-6". We charged $14 for ten stems ($1.40 per stem) and sold 15 bunches total, about five of each variety. The feedback was universal: everyone liked them, but they needed to be longer. We found that 'Dark Mambo' was the hardiest, and had the longest and most abundant stems.

I would not recommend growing begonias to farmers in Zone 7 or similar who don't have heated greenhouses; they are too sensitive to extreme temperatures and overwatering.

Huge thanks to the kind people at Plantsmith, a nursery in Oregon that specializes in begonias. Here are some notes that they gave us on begonia culture for cutting:

- Start the plant off right. The first two weeks can determine the quality of the crop.
- Night temperatures should be 70F degrees for the first two weeks.
- Night temperatures after that should be above 55F but plants grower better at a minimum of 62F. Temperatures should be under 100F during day.
- We grow our plants pot tight for half the crop, then space the 6" pots at 10 X 10" or about 1.5 plants per square foot. This will give you very good returns on your bench space.
- Grow in lowered light levels. After two weeks, grow on at 1200 to 1500 foot-candles. In western Oregon, we grow in full light until April 1, then 50% shade until May then 75% shade the rest of the summer. Light levels higher than this will stunt the plant, even if you see no burn.
- Plant into very porous potting media. While Jurassic Rex begonias have stronger root systems than other Rex Begonias, they still benefit from an open, loose soil mix. They hate overwatering. Let soil get on the dry side before watering, but don't allow the plants to wilt.
- Fertility. Maintain an EC between 1.5 and 1.8 if possible. We constant feed at 160 ppm except in darkest weather when we increase to 200 ppm nitrogen. Something like a 20-10-20 is fine. In winter we feed with a low ammonia fertilizer. Coated fertilizer like Apex or Osmocote can cause problems.
- Don't grow too cold. Our varieties finish reasonably fast with a 62F night temperature with days around 75F. Higher temperatures will decrease crop time; lower temperatures will increase crop time.

Grower Grants Awarded

These members will perform on-farm research with funding from the ASCFG.

Meghan McHugh and Denise Richter of Pistil and Stamen Flower Farm, New Orleans, Louisiana

Pistil and Stamen is looking to investigate the specific viability of cultivars whose growing zone recommendations are up to zone 9, but have been considered unviable in our unique climate (Gulf South, zone 9b); specifically hellebores, peonies, and astilbe. We often hear "peonies won't grow" in our zone, but in small experiments we have learned that's not completely true, so we're comparing multiple cultivars among specific crops. Research and information about production flower farming in the gulf south (and deep south to a lesser extent) are very scant. Our goal is to create a body of information for specialty crop perennials in our area, in addition to expanding our own perennial offerings.

Bailey Hale and Thomas McCurdy, Ardelia Farm Company in Irasburg, Vermont

We will be examining the possible benefits of soil cooling, using recirculated chilled water, to produce freesia, ranunculus, and anemones outside their typical seasons. Soil temperature has been proven to play a large role in the induction of dormancy in many plants. Delaying the onset of heat induced dormancy may result in a higher quality harvest of these valuable crops at a time when they have not traditionally been available.

Meet the ASCFG's Newest Members

Claire Aldersong, Flicker Townes Farmette, Eugene, OR
Denisa Anderson, Merrily Along Floral, Everson, WA
Lanette Anderson, Hidden Villa, Los Altos Hills, CA
Sarah Anderson, Bee Well Blooms, Emmaus, PA
Angie Andrade, Denver, CO
Betsy Arriola, Country Petals, New Ulm, TX
Sharee Avila, Rougemont, NC
Lisa Barnett, Backcountry Gardens, Ramona, CA
Nancy Barrett, Scantic Valley Farm, Somers, CT
Bristol Bentley, Bristol's Redbird Farm, Harrington, ME
Heather Betzhold, Blue Bucket Farm, Hartland, WI
Lori and Jim Bochner, Bochner Farms, Indianola, IA
Astrid Bowlby, Honey Petal Plants, Brooks, ME
Jodi Bubenzer, Sunflower Hill Farm, New Glarus, WI
Sarah Burke, Bloomette Flowers, Carbondale, IL
Stacey Cannon, Palette Farm, Ardmore, TN
Miranda Carfagno, Rega Garden Co., Pottstown, PA
Meghan Carota, Blue Truck Farm, King of Prussia, PA
Jonalyn and Clay Carver, Blossom Lane Farm, Baker, FL
Kiley Chamberlin, Chamberlin's Farm and Garden, Underhill, VT
Heather Champney, St. Mary's School Anchored in Flowers, Johnson City, TN
Katie Chandler, Twenty Acres, West Point, MS
Stacey Chapman, Orange, VA
Melonie Christian, Harvest Moon Farm, Decatur, TX
Linda Clark, Happy Fibers and Flowers, Media, PA
Heather Coen, Pasture Raised Posies, New Concord, OH
Annette Cooke, Cooke Family Farm, Wendell, NC
Amy Crawford, Cotati, CA
Rachel Cross, Spirit of Walloon Market Garden, Boyne City, MI
Jordan Crump, Neva Hills Farm, Edmonton, KY
Matt Diemer, Bighorn Blooms, Fort Collins, CO
Mallory Diesterhaft, Sanders, KY
Ollie Dodt, Villakulla Flora, Detroit, MI
Kristy and Neal Drury, Backyard Produce & Cut Flowers, Belle Fourche, SD
Sophie Ducharme, Sainte Christine, Quebec
Cassy Eddy, Bloom & Spruce, Johnstown, OH
Ellen Edler, Edler Acres, Ontario, NY
Angela Farrell, Give Joy Gardens, McClelland, IA
Stephanie Finkelberg, Sweet Earth Co., Pleasantville, NY
Dylan Fishman, Foxglove Flower Farm, Bozeman, MT
Holly Flemming, Fairfax, VA
Amanda Fogarty, Longbourn Blooms, Quarryville, PA
Callie Frazier, Aster Acres, Berthoud, CO
Staci Freese, Heirloom Blooms Farm, Grundy Center, IA
Camber Gadberry, 4 Paws Flower Farm, Paola, KS
Peter Gariss, Port Townsend, WA
Will Gates, Cutleaf Farm, Richmond, TX
Tina Gaul, Gracemir Flower Farm, Campbellville, Ontario
Veronica Geisenhof, Country Sunshine, Brainard, MN
Mark Gilbertson, Midwest Dahlias, Minneapolis, MN
Anna Glenn, Sungold Flower Co., Dickerson, MD
Linda Goss, Bella Vista Blooms, Milroy, PA
Jessica Graven, Blue River Blooms, Wellsville, KS
Bill Gravert, Hamilton, MT
James and Katie Haack, Wild Canary Farm, Duvall, WA
Cassie Hammarmeister, Roots In Bloom, Marion, IA
Corinne Hansch, Lovin Mama Farm, Amsterdam, NY
Shannon Harker, Denver, CO
Elizabeth Harlan, Belvedere Farm, Fallston, MD
Wesley Harrell, Due West, SC
Eugenia Harris, Nicewicz Family Farm, Austin, TX
Jennifer Hartman, Kimball Flower Farm, Columbus, OH
Sarah Hawkless, Emerden, Stratford, AL
Erin Heilman, Interlochen Blooms, Interlochen, MI
Jennifer Hendrickson, Hendrickson Acres, Unity, WI
Shayla Henry, Tulips and Twine, Pequea, PA
Delisa Hiel, Gardenwerks, Helena, MT
Dawn Highberger, Bear Creek Blossoms, Wallowa, OR
Denise Hines, Marengo, IA
Raquel Hink, Blossom Flower Farm, Louisville, CO
Elizabeth Hintz, Cottage Grove, OR
Carole Holla, Holla's Produce & Greenhouse, Val-Caron, Ontario
Tabitha Houle, Houle Flower Farm, Little Falls, NY
Peggy Huff, The Flower Coop, Albion, ME
Lindsay Hufford, Peck & Petal Farm, Plymouth, MI
Lori Huster, Decatur, GA
Maxwell Hyde, Smellin' Somethin' Good Farms, Frierson, LA
Terri Jacobsen, Eagle Hill Farm, Oregon, IL
Anna Johnson, Morehead, KY
Larry Johnson, Montvale Meadows Farm, Roanoke, VA
Shayne Johnson, Fred C. Gloeckner & Co., Inc., Lakeville, MN
Jennifer and Scott Joray, Eastern River Farm, Salem, MA
Janelle Kaiser, Cedar Grove, WI
Cristin Kasprzak, Porch & Prairie, Crockett, TX
Janine Lidell, Katherine Karnezis, Future Farm and Flowers, St. Helens, OR
Beth Kendall, Flower Farmer Girls, Snohomish, WA
Allison Kerwin, The Enchanted Garden, Hancock, NH
Karyn Kloter, Frog Hollow Flower Farm, Ellington, CT
Krynn Knepfel, Bloomchick Flower Company, Springfield, TN
Jennifer Kozlansky, Laughing Earth, Factoryville, PA
Carol Krausem, Flower Farmer Girls, Snohomish, WA

Meet the ASCFG's Newest Members (continued)

Phoebe Lake, New Leaf Nursery, Brenham, TX
Leah Latiolais, Covey Rise Farms, Husser, LA
Julie Lechtenberger, Haley Wynn Designs, Georgetown, TX
Amy Lee, Lush & Local: The Flower Ladies, Strasburg, VA
Amanda Lehman, Butternut Gardens, Stamford, CT
Emily Leshner, Dewdrop Farm, Sebastopol, CA
Preston Loveless, Love's Produce & Nursery, Greeneville, TN
Suzanne Luftig, Dirty Girl Flower Farm, Hackettstown, NJ
Bronwyn Lunceford, Sunnyhill Farm, Huntsville, TX
LeAnne Lund, Hope Blooms Flower Farm, Grove City, MN
Brittny Malec, Wild Hour Blooms, Minneapolis, MN
JoAnne Malone, Murfreesboro, TN
Abby Matson, Diddle and Zen, Panton, VT
Zahilis Mazzochette, Hammonton, NJ
Christine McGowan, Stowe Flower Farm, Stowe, VT
Rachel McKenna, McKenna Acres Flower Farm, Coventry, CT
Melanie Melander, Assaria, KS
Brittney Merriman, Merriman Farm, Woodland, WA
Lindsay Millard, Lindsay's Flower Patch, Orange City, IA
Simon E. and Ida Miller, Blooming Acres, Clark, MO
Jan Mooney, Garden Petals, Cabot, AR
Melissa Morales, Stillwater, OK
Liz Morris, Southern Sower, Irmo, SC
Deidre Morrison, Honey Smiles Flower Co., Boulder, CO
Robert Muller, Fred C. Gloeckner & Co., Inc., Forest Hill, MD
Ann Munson, Ann Munson Design, West Linn, OR
Karen Murdoch, Carolina Bloomers, Asheboro, NC
Ina Norsworthy, Fox Holler Farm, Appling, GA
Don Norton, Norton's Greenhouse, Toledo, IA
April Nugent, Vandalia, OH
Christina Onstott, Onstott Agricultural, Justin, TX
Kathleen J. Osborne, The Land of Oz, Kiowa, CO
Brittany Overshiner, Upswing Farm, Bellingham, MA
Erika Pedersen, Plymouth, MA
Anne Pellot, Morrow Glen Flowers, Mason, OH
Erica Penn, The Bloom Flower Farm, Hilltown, PA
Misty Perryman, Moody, TX
Sarah Pierce, Fiddler's Knoll Farm, New Gloucester, ME
Tawny Pierce, Testarossa Farms, Blanchester, OH
Tim Pierce, Verona, WI
Barbara Pini, Bunches & Bunches Flower Farm, Gardnerville, NV
Rachel Plahovinsak, Looking Glass Floral, Columbus, OH
Diana Precht, Rocky Mountain Blooms, Loveland, CO
Tammy Randolph, Red Sled Farms, North Pole, AK
Jess Oldham and Rhonda Gotway-Clyde, Easy Bee Farm, Moab, UT
MacKenzie Richardson, Beulah Blooms at Richardson Farms, Monticello, KY
Robin Rieder, Cando, ND
William Robbins, Sauvie Island Peonies, Portland, OR
Becky Robison, Lana's Garden, Tulelake, CA
Chris Romer, White Oaks Farm, Oberlin, OH
Shelley Russell, Sunnyside Florals, Clements, MD
Michael Russo, Trout Lily Farm, Guilford, CT
Dustin Saunders, Little Hollow Flowers, Berthoud, CO
Barbara Sensen, Gaertnerei, Rosalie DE Alpen, Germany
Morgan Sharpe, Creekside Flower Farm, Chattanooga, TN
Tracy Shaw, The Willows Flower Farm, Bellingham, WA
Alexis Sheffield, Wild Roots, Harrodsburg, KY
Julia Simpson, Lawrenceville, GA
Karen Skilling, MJK Garden, Cleveland, TX
Rebecca Smith, Aurora Flower Farm, Cremona, Alberta
Miya Sohoza, Mud Lane Blooms, Felicity, OH
Justine Spits, Rigaud, Quebec
Patricia Starkey, Petals & Pages, Fernley, NV
Maria and Suzanne Starrs, Bella's Blooms, Linden, MI
Molly Stentz, Yellow Dog Flowers and Produce, Madison, WI
Jill Stidham, Titus Creek Flower Farm, La Plata, MO
Daniel and Rebecca Stoltzfus, Sunrise Valley Farm, Christiana, PA
Mimi Strouse, Lavender Hive, McLean, VA
Sandra Summerbell, Izzie's Garden, Glen Ellyn, IL
Emily Sustick, Red House Flowers, Victor, ID
Rosie Sweetman, Little Wings Farm, Eugene, OR
Amanda Taylor, HomeSown Flowers, Escalon, CA
Suzanne Thomas, Denver Daylilies, Denver, CO
Nancy Thompson, Liberty Flower Farm, Spout Spring, VA
Nicole Thorp, Storybook Flower Farm, Oliver, British Columbia
Jessica and Andy Tiefenbach, Small Town Roots, Byron Center, MI
Mindy Todd, Petals, Lake Oswego, OR
Robin Todd, Wilder Farms and Flowers, Adel, IA
Emily Towne, Full Plate Farm, Russellville, MO
Chase Tyndell, Vintage Farming Co., Rosenberg, TX
Kim Urso, Yellow Petal Flower Farm, Dayton, NV
Vanessa Vancuren, Pops Flowers, Fife, WA
Robin VanWingerden, Hidden Horseshoe Farm, Sussex, NJ
Tracey Vanzella, The Flower and The Bee, British Columbia
Julia C. Violette, Paint Box Flower Farm, Orrington, ME
Brandie S. Waite, Bergen, NY
Kim Wands, Bees, Blooms & Bakery at Providence Farm, Dunlap, TN
Elizabeth Wardlaw, Gardenia, Exeter, MO
Lindsay Warren, Lindsay Warren, Austin, TX
Susan Warren, Lindsay Warren, Fort Collins, CO
Christy Wilkinson, Irons in the Fire, Spring Grove, VA
Amy Williams, Foxtail Farm, Freeland, WA
Laura R. Williamson, Broadway, VA
Chelsea Willis, Sweet Delilah Farm, Portland, OR
Kathleen Wood, Kashwitna Peonies Farm, Willow, AK
Sande Yelton, Sky Flower Farm, Burlington, KY
Kimberly Zimmerman, Denver, CO
Laura Zimmermann, Cool Hollow Flower Farm, Hagerstown, MD

Dave Dowling Scholarship Winners

Dave Dowling owned a successful cut flower farm in Maryland for several years. He placed great emphasis on introducing young people to horticulture through employment on his farm, bringing them to ASCFG conferences, and mentoring them as they moved into their own cut flower businesses. Dave is responsible for the success of many new growers across the country. His generosity and enthusiasm for sharing are unparalleled.

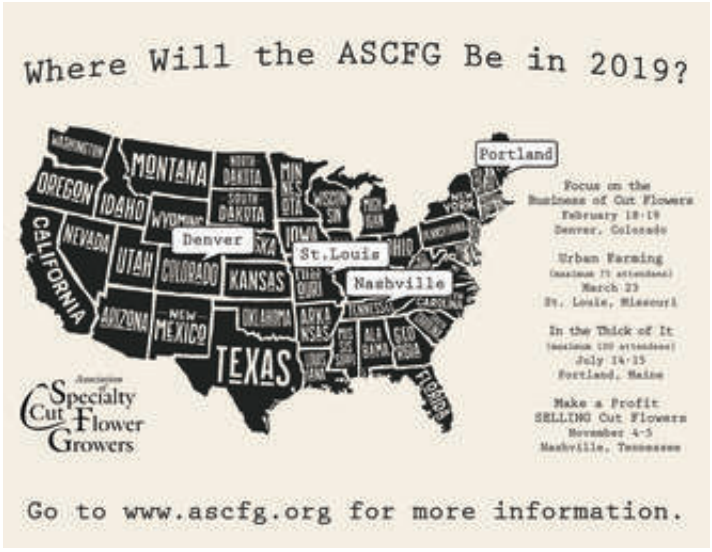
Meet this year's recipients of the Dave Dowling Scholarship

On top of my academic classes and part-time jobs, I will be putting every second of my free time into my flower operation. I've been preparing my business plan for years; I have had flowers picked out from GeoSeed and Johnny's since high school; and I put every penny I make into a fund the startup of my company, Sun and Honey.

Brittany LeFebvre will graduate with a bachelor's degree in horticulture, plant and soil sciences from the University of Kentucky in 2021, and has already started her own cut flower farm in the heart of Kentucky bluegrass country.

I'm most interested in the design aspect of cut flower production, and I feel I'm best at wedding designs. I've already worked for several florists, and ordered most of the product from local wholesalers.

Hannah Silvey studies at Mississippi State University, from which she will graduate in May of 2021. She plans to become a florist in her home state of South Carolina.



Thanks for the Good Word

You connected some of our new members to the ASCFG!

Gretel and Steve Adams
Rita Anders
Allan Armitage
Frank and Pamela Arnosky
Anna Bankhead
Erin Benzakein
Shailah Bunce
Jessica Chase
Amanda Cook
Xenia D'Ambrosi
Mimo Davis
Linda Doan
Patti Doell
Dave Dowling
Matt Gerald
Michael Genovese
Heather Gregory
Barbara Jewell
Cathy Jones
Anna Jane Kocon
Maya Kosok
Bev Lacey
Barb Lamborne
Lennie Larkin
Evelyn Lee
Megan and Jonathan Leiss
Jennie Love
Mary Marston
Sara Mallory
Martin Mesker
Amanda Montgomery
Mary Ellen Muth
Debra Prinzing
Shanti Rade
Caitlin Robinson
Jamie Rohda
Nelson Rohrer
Val Schirmer
Joe Schmitt
Tom Seibert
Mary Slingluff
Melissa Smith
Carolyn Snell
Rosie Standish
Lynsey Taulbee
Kat Taylor
Joseph Tedrow
Ralph Thurston
Carly Waddell
Lindsay Warren
Rita Williams
Lisa Ziegler
Gail Zorn

July 14-15, 2019 Portland, Maine

Sunday, July 14

Snell Family Farm
1000 River Road, Buxton

9:00 a.m.

Meet at Snell Family Farm for registration and introductions.
Learn about nurturing soil health from Jason Lilley of University of Maine.
His current research involves cover crop variety trials for earliness
in organic and conventional conservation tillage practices.

Tour Snell Family Farm with Carolyn Snell.
Her four-acre flower farm works within her multigenerational plant, vegetable,
and apple farm. See growing systems and equipment in greenhouses and fields,
as well as her processing and design studio and the Snells' retail farm stand.

12:00 noon

Lunch at Snell Farm (included with registration)
Pizza, soup, and sweet treats from the Snell Farm Kitchen. Gluten-free and vegan options available.

1:00 p.m.

Drive on your own to Broadturn Farm.

Broadturn Farm
388 Broadturn Road, Scarborough

Tour the farm and see intensive flower production in fields, and several styles of tunnels and greenhouses.
Watch a demonstration of efficient cut flower processing and workflow to fulfill multiple bouquet
orders quickly, as well as how the team has arranged their design studio for wedding work.

4:00 p.m.

Depart Broadturn Farm

6:00 p.m.

End-of-day networking TBD

Monday, July 15

Drive on your own to Johnny's Selected Seeds Trial Grounds, 201 State Route 9, Albion.
Introductions and instructions to Johnny's trialing programs and growing methods will be given at 9:00 a.m. and at 10:00 a.m.,
then you'll be able to tour on your own to see over 700 varieties of cut flowers, many of which will likely be in bloom.

Drive on your own to Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens, Boothbay.
Discounted admission is $12 per person for those who RSVP for this portion with your registration.

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November 4-5, 2019 Green Door Gourmet Nashville, Tennessee

Monday, November 4

7:30 a.m. Registration - Coffee and light refreshments

8:30 a.m. Welcome

8:45 a.m. Finding Your Own Niche in Crowded Market
Lennie Larkin, B-Side Farm, Sebastopol, CA
Are tales of a saturated market stopping you from starting a thriving business? Lennie will take you through the ins and outs of her evolving business model in the crowded flower space of sunny California, and impart tips on everything from how to find new customers, to knowing when to step up or step back in a crowded market, to handling competition with grace and finding your competitive advantage, to a warning against undercutting other growers or designers. Get ready for anecdotes, tangible take-homes, and perhaps a graph or two as we revisit some supply and demand curves straight out of an economics textbook.

9:50 a.m. Listen to Your Heart. And Your Head. And Your Accountant.
Bailey Hale, Ardelia Farm and Farmer Bailey Plugs, Irasburg, VA
Bailey will explain how he and his partner fell into farming, their MANY failures, and they've reinvented themselves several times to focus on sanity and profitability. We'll learn worked for them, and why it may not work for everyone, including some context about how we all fit into the global flower industry.

10:55 a.m. If You Build It, They Will Come
Linda Doan, Aunt Willie's Wildflowers, Blountville, TN
Don't sell just your flowers, sell your farm experience as well. Farm tours, photography workshops, design workshops, cut and carry—Linda will consider how these options are available to add income to your business by bringing dollars to your property.

Noon Lunch (included with registration) with Green Door Gourmet Chef. Here's an opportunity to stretch your legs and visit Green Door Gourmet's farm store.

1:30 p.m. Rethinking On-farm Sales
Lisa Ziegler, The Gardener's Workshop, Newport News, VA
On-farm sales can be so much more than a farm stand. Lisa will share how she over-came some of the challenges facing urban farmers and city ordinances to sell flowers from her farm. Learn about her Members-Only Flower Market model that is going into its 15th year, bouquet subscription program, and other methods that will make a profit.

2:30 p.m. Extreme Marketing: How to Attract Your Champagne Clients on a Beer Budget
Julio Freitas, The Flower Hat, Bozeman, MT
Learn out how The Flower Hat made six figures on virtually no budget.

3:40 p.m. Forcing Glorious Blooms for Holiday Sales—and Beyond Val Schirmer, Three Toads Farm, Winchester, KY
In this "show and tell" presentation, Val will share how she chooses, forces, stages, and sells specialty bulbs—namely, big bold beautiful amaryllis and paperwhites—for holiday sales. And the good news? For anyone who hasn't tried it yet, or is thinking about doing it again, there's still time to give it a go this year.

4:45 p.m. Live Auction to benefit the ASCFG Research Foundation

Tuesday, November 5

8:00 a.m. Coffee and light refreshments

8:30 a.m. Making a Profit with Dried Material (or #whattodowithdeadstuff)
Emily Daniel, Basil & Bergamot Flower Farm, Whites Creek, TN
Dried flowers are making a comeback! Emily will discuss old and new drying processes, and share new trends in dried materials, as well as marketing strategies and results from the new varieties she's trialing. She'll show us how to use dried flowers in fresh arrangements as she demonstrates design techniques. After Emily's presentation, everyone is invited to try their hands at a dried hand-tied bouquet. Instead of bringing fresh flowers to this event, we're asking for any type of dried material you can gather and share. We'll have rubber bands and ribbon available to tie up your creations, and will take a group photo of #whattodowithdeadstuff.

10:00 a.m. Farm Tour
We probably won't cover all 350 acres of Green Door Gourmet, but we may see their cut flower and vegetable greenhouses, hoophouses, packing sheds, and retail shop.

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Dr. William H Preston, Jr. 1929 - 2019

Horticulturist, Environmental Scientist, and Farmer

William "Bill" Preston passed away peacefully February 18 after a long, happy, and accomplished life, surrounded by family and friends. He was a lifelong resident of the Bowie, Maryland area and contributed much to the community and environment he loved.

He was an alumnus of the University of Maryland, achieving his Ph.D. in horticulture and earning a U.S. patent for his doctoral work on phosphonium compounds for plant dwarfing. His early career was with the USDA, where he quickly rose in responsibility, eventually managing 13 laboratories and over 200 scientists across the U.S. for testing of pesticides. In 1970, this division became part of the newly formed Environmental Protection Agency. At the EPA, Dr. Preston chaired a national conference that created workable solutions for safely disposing of unused pesticides. This program is still in place today and has prevented many tons of pesticides from needlessly polluting the environment and injuring people.

Another legacy of Dr. Preston's while at the EPA was to lead the creation of the approval process to assure pesticides are sufficiently safe to not cause harm to water, wildlife, farm workers, and consumers. For this work, he was awarded the Silver Medal for Outstanding Service, the second-highest recognition for an employee of the U.S. government.

Dave Dowling calls Bill the Fred Rogers of the Maryland Flower Growers Association. "He was always there to listen intently to other growers' problems, then gently offer his solution. He was never overbearing, or gave the impression he knew more than you. Even though, clearly, he did.

After an early retirement at age 53, Bill embraced the life of a farmer by starting a small but successful cut flower business. He and his loving (and patient) wife Corinne were fixtures at the College Park and Takoma Park farmers' markets, where Bill's enthusiasm for sharing his knowledge of growing flowers was as contagious as his flowers were beautiful. Bill was a founding member of the Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers, and a regular attendee and speaker at many national conferences. In 2002 he was honored as Cut Flower Grower of the Year by the Maryland Greenhouse Growers Association.

In his later years, Bill and Corinne moved from their Glenn Dale home to the Collington Retirement Community where he remained energetic, enthusiastic, and involved in nearly every gardening- and plant-related activity until his last days, which is exactly how he wanted it.

In Bill's memory, please consider a donation to support the next generation of leaders in horticulture through the American Society for Horticultural Science Endowment Fund, https://ashs.org/donations/

Call for Nominations

"None of us is as smart as all of us." – Ken Blanchard

Since its inception, the ASCFG Board of Directors has been made up creative and generous members who donate their time to the continuing excellence of the organization. Meeting only twice yearly in spacious and luxurious accommodations (photo), they work together to chart the course for the ASCFG.

If you're grateful for the service your colleagues have provided to the ASCFG, please let them know, and then, make your own contribution by stepping up as a nominee for the next Board.

This summer, you'll have the chance to run for Northeast Regional Director, Mid-Atlantic Regional Director, Southeast Regional Director, and Canadian Regional Director. Each is a three-year term. Secretary and Treasurer are also up for election. Candidates for Treasurer must have served previously on the Board.

For more information, contact the ASCFG office. We'll be happy to fill you in.

Ask an Expert!

LIVE

Our Facebook live events have become popular and useful exchanges of information. Take advantage of these opportunities to ask questions of cut flower growers in real time, and connect with other members as well.

Log on at 8:00 p.m. Eastern time to learn from these Experts:

April 8
Carolyn Snell—retail marketing

May 13
Erin McMullen—TBD

June 10
Mimo Davis—planning for winter production

June 24
Brian Hudelson—plant diseases

July 8
John Dole—postharvest

August 12
Ellen Frost—selling to florists

September 9
TBD

October 14
Brenda Smith—on-farm research

November 11
Meghan McHugh and Denise Richter—urban farming

December 10
Janis Harris—winterscaping and wreaths

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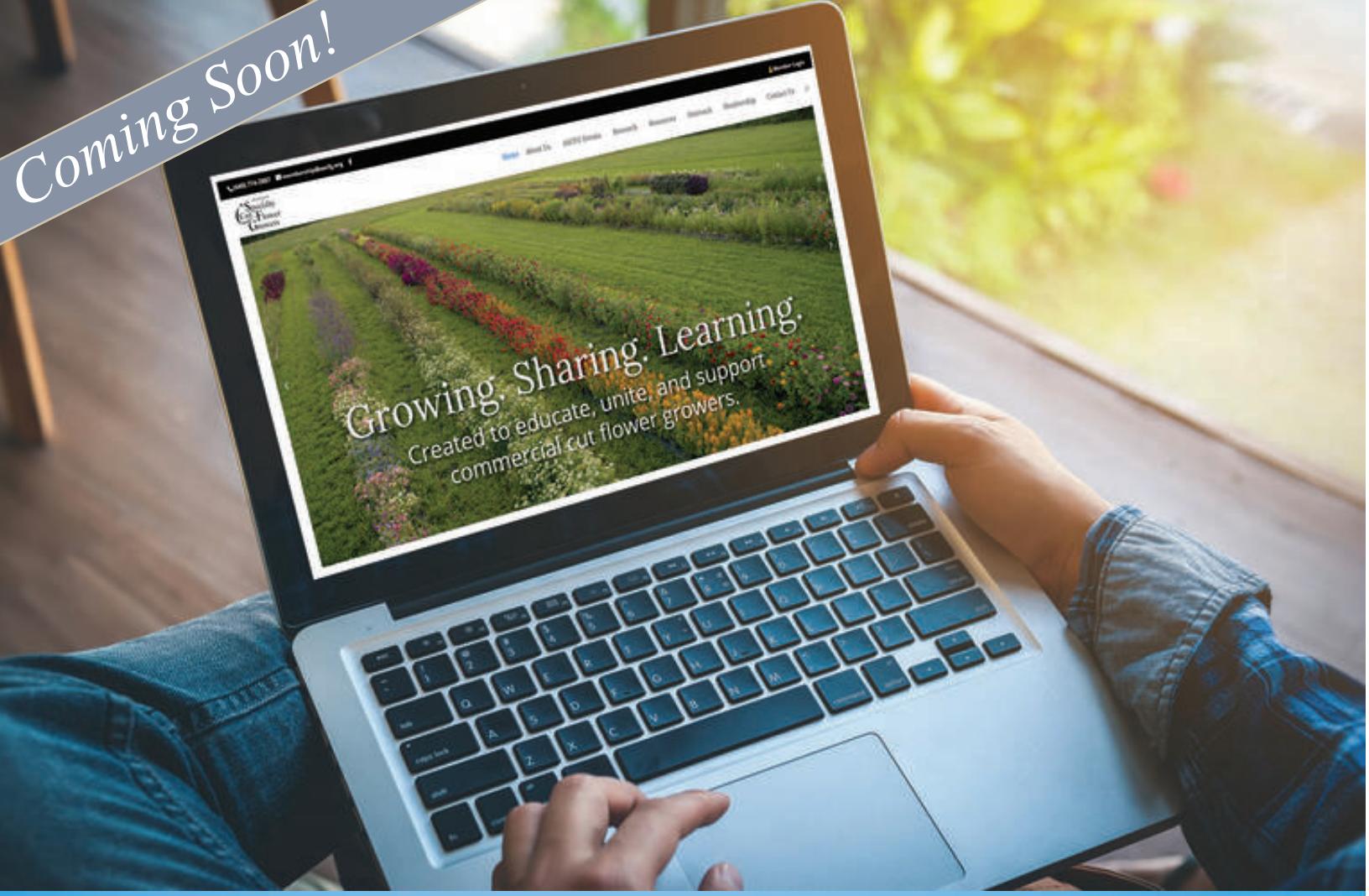
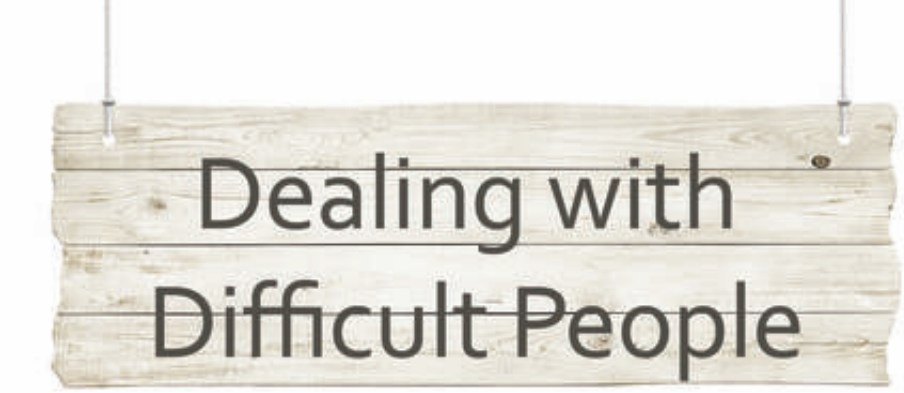
Oberlin, Ohio



Look What's Blooming at the ASCFG!

www.ascfg.org



We all know them—the difficult people. The ones who challenge us to the core.

Unfortunately, we can't ship them all off to their own island, so we must learn how to deal with them. Fortunately, it's possible, but it may require a level of soul searching that you have not yet attempted. At the risk of sounding like Oprah (not that there's anything wrong with that), here are 15 ideas for handling challenging people.

1. Accept reality.
Difficult people are not likely to change; they behave that way for a reason. They may have had challenges in their lives that negatively affect their ability to interact with others. As hard as it may be, try to show empathy and compassion, and see them as human beings just like you. They're doing the best they can with what life has given them.

2. Don't take it personally.
Their issues are their issues and have nothing to do with you. If you take it personally, your emotions will come into play, which will increase the likelihood of conflict.

3. Listen.
It sounds simplistic, but it really is an effective tool. Sometimes people are difficult because they don't feel heard or understood. Merely listening to them is a great way to acknowledge their viewpoint, and gain an understanding of what they want, and from there progress can begin.

4. Be very clear.
If you let your intentions be known, and give them the reasons and background behind your thought process, they will be better able to empathize with you and therefore more likely to cooperate.

5. Prepare.
Think about how the conversation will go and what feelings will arise for you, and then you will be better equipped to deal with the emotions when they surface.

6. Be positive.
If you are thinking about how you can create a good outcome, it puts your brain in a very creative and positive mode.

7. Breathe.
Deep breaths are scientifically proven to have a calming effect. It's a great method to deploy before, during, and after your troubling interaction.

8. Show respect.
Hiding your true feelings is not always easy, especially if this person has repeatedly caused problems for you. However you will have much better results with a congenial tone.

9. Stick to the facts.
Literally approach it like a science experiment—separate facts from assumptions and negative emotions. This will keep the conversation on more of an even keel.

10. Connect on a personal level.
This one may make you laugh, and if going to lunch with this person is out of the question, that's fine. But at the very least, have some interactions on a personal level. This could be as simple as asking about his or her family or hobbies. The likelihood of conflict decreases in proportion to the rapport you have in place.

11. View it as a learning experience.
You may chuckle at this one too, but life really does hand us lemons for a reason.

12. Seek advice.
Sometimes talking about an impossible situation aloud will yield answers you wouldn't find otherwise. Plus, the third party isn't emotionally involved and therefore may see a solution that wouldn't occur to you in your state of angst.

13. Let it go.
If you focus on how crazy the person is, that gives him power over you. Try not to let the situation haunt your thoughts.

14. De-stress.
Take the dog for a walk. Do yoga. Meditate. Watch your favorite television show. Anything to just loosen up a bit and take the focus off the stressful situation.

15. Congratulate yourself.
It's time for chocolate, a glass of wine, or heck—even an ice cream sundae! You have certainly earned it, and treating yourself for a job well done in a difficult situation is always a good idea.

So, yes: there are people who were put on this earth to challenge us. But if we take the right approach, we can add some much-need sanity to what is too often a toxic situation.

From Print Matters, *Volume 13, Issue 2, March 2019*

From the DIRECTOR

Moving Ahead Through 2019

Judy M. Laushman

As other contributors have noted in this issue, the ASCFG Board of Directors met in February, leaving Denver with multi-page lists of new projects and potential changes to existing member services.

The first and most obvious is a new design for the ASCFG web site. Many hours were devoted to this change; we hope this platform provides a more appealing portal to members, potential members, and those looking to purchase our locally-grown specialty cut flowers.

Planning grower meetings, including speaker sessions, farm tours, and trade and floral design shows far enough in advance for efficient production and marketing is always challenging; the Board has taken steps to confirm dates and locations sooner than in the past.

Other potential programs are in the works. All these projects will depend on the active participation of every ASCFG member, if they are to work as designed. Please take small steps to help: update your membership information when you renew, be sure your listing at localflowers.org is current, and continue to promote the ASCFG whenever and wherever you can. One of the simplest ways to do this is to share the ASCFG's short film "Local Flowers, Local Farmers". It's easily accessible at YouTube. We're pretty proud of it.

402,000 views *and counting!*

https://youtu.be/PEXs9UUgqqg

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